DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 310 420 CS 212 073

AUTHOR Jensen, Julie M., Comp.
TITLE The Best of "Livewire": Practical Classroom Activities for Elementary and Middle School Students.
INSTITUTION National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, Ill.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 85p.
AVAILABLE FROM National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Rd., Urbana, IL 61801 (Stock No. 30186-3020; $4.95 member, $6.50 nonmember).
PUB TYPE Books (010) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Activities; Creative Teaching; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Curriculum; *English Instruction; *Language Arts; Learning Activities; Middle Schools; Teacher Developed Materials; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

This book is a collection of imaginative teaching ideas taken from past issues of "Livewire," a publication devoted to the exchange of practical teaching ideas for the elementary and middle school classroom. The book presents the teaching ideas grouped according to grade levels. The three sections are "Primary--Discovering Language and Literature"; "Intermediate--Making Meaning: Integrating the Language Arts"; and "Advanced Intermediate--Extending Language Learning." (MS)

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The Best of LIVEWIRE

Practical Classroom Activities for Elementary and Middle School Students

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Selected by
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The Best of *Livewire*

Practical Classroom Activities for Elementary and Middle School Students

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Cover Design: Michael J. Getz; illustration by Louise Krauss

Interior Design: Tom Kovacs for TGK Design

NCTE Stock Number 30186-3020

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Preface

Livewire was a unique publication, devoted to the exchange of practical teaching ideas for the elementary and middle school classroom. During its three years of publication, it was filled with lively and creative strategies contributed by teachers across the country.

In this collection, *The Best of* Livewire, we have assembled some of the most imaginative teaching ideas from past issues, grouped according to grade levels. The three sections are Primary—Discovering Language and Literature, Intermediate—Making Meaning: Integrating the Language Arts, and Advanced Intermediate—Extending Language Learning.

Primary—Discovering Language and Literature

Learning from a Feely Box

In this activity, students compare and contrast familiar and unfamiliar textures. Begin by preparing a "feely box" in which a student can insert a hand and can feel a texture without seeing the object. You'll need a half-gallon cardboard milk container or a shoe box with a lid, miscellaneous textures (a scrap of carpet, burlap, a woven basket, a fir twig, sand, rubber bands, marbles, etc.), magazines, scissors, tape or glue, paper, pencils, and crayons.

You can either open the top of a half-gallon cardboard milk container and cover the container with self-adhesive plastic paper (leaving the top open for the student's hand), or cut a hole in the side of a lidded shoe box. Place drawing and writing materials and the "feely box" on a table in the center of the room and post a class roster nearby.

As an introduction to describing textures, ask students to sit in a circle and close their eyes as you say, "Imagine that you are petting a baby bunny. Move your hand over the back of the bunny. Your fingertips are helping you feel the bunny. Now open your eyes and tell us what that bunny felt like." My students made these comments:

"My bunny's big."
"Mine's wiggly . . . and soft."
"Yeah, soft."

As students think of words, write them on the board. Point out that a number of different touch words can be used to describe the same texture.

Next, hold up the "feely box" and tell students that each will have the chance to close his or her eyes and feel the texture inside. You will place a different object in the "feely box" every day or two, or as long as student interest lasts. After a student feels the textured object in the box, he or she uses drawing materials from the center table and describes the texture, whether by writing descriptive words, drawing a picture of the texture, or cutting out and pasting magazine pictures that show a similar texture.

Students are responsible for putting checks by their names on the class roster after feeling each texture and for taping their response

sheets up on the display board. When everyone's name is checked off, indicating that each person has felt an object, hold a class meeting to discuss all the responses and to open the "feely box" to see what's inside.

A three-ring notebook makes a handy permanent record of student descriptions. After the objects from the "feely box" are taped or glued onto pages, students can review the experience individually, read their own and classmates' descriptions, and look at the drawings they created to match the textures. As a follow-up activity, students enjoy the challenge offered by Tana Hoban's *Look Again* (Macmillan, 1981). This book contains unusual photographs of textures of ordinary objects. It invites active discussion. You might also consider showing *Scholastic Magazine*'s Beginning Concepts filmstrip *Bumpy Lumpy*, which presents ordinary objects and unusual texture words with lively music.

Ellen R. Smachetti, North Adams, Massachusetts

Competent Communicators

Who wouldn't rather hear a *story* than a *lecture?* Whether your class is studying the birds, the bees, or the wildebeests, a guest speaker with personal anecdotes and photographs will stimulate student interest more than any amount of lecturing or research. An activity centering around a guest speaker makes students more competent communicators by getting them involved in:

critical reading to prepare questions and phrase answers

careful listening to record information

speaking and writing to share with others the facts that impressed them

Our first-grade class was fortunate enough to find a doctoral student who raises cockatiels. To find your own guest speaker, try asking your colleagues for ideas, asking your students for suggestions, asking students if their parents have personal knowledge of the topic, and writing to local townspeople or college students who have an interest in the topic. Once you've made the initial contact with the chosen speaker, let your students show their interest by drafting a class invitation. As the scribe for the class, you write the letter on the board as it is dictated and ask students to read it back carefully to make sure that no vital information has been left out. Do students say where and when they would like the visitor to arrive? Is a room number given? Write a final copy of

the letter and encourage students to draw pictures to accompany the letter and to write individual messages on their pictures. Include these personal invitations with the group invitation when you mail it to the guest speaker.

Allow students several class periods to read books and magazines about the topic, in preparation for phrasing questions that are detailed and specific. After these reading sessions, you can inspire question writing by starting a list of *Facts Known* on the board. Supply a category such as *What birds look like* and ask students to call out their ideas. The completed list reminds students what they already know about birds, and can be left on the board to be updated after the speaker visits. My students developed the following list:

What birds look like	*Where birds live*
feathers	nests
different colors	birdhouses
different beaks	cages in a house
wings	
different feet	
different sizes	
What birds do	*What birds eat*
fly	worms
hop	berries
make nests	seeds
find food	bread
feed babies	crumbs
lay eggs	water
take baths	
sing	
some talk	

After students devise questions to ask the guest speaker, they can read their questions aloud to one another and talk about how *they* would answer each question, based on what they already know. To ensure that each student has the chance to ask at least one question, have students select one or two questions each, the ones that they most want the speaker to answer. Write these questions on chart paper, including the student's name, so that students can read their own questions aloud on the day the guest speaker visits. At that time, students take turns asking questions and the speaker answers by giving

facts, showing photos, and sharing memories of incidents that illustrate the point. (Our speaker brought photos not only of her birds but of the eggs from which they hatched.) Students who are not asking questions can keep notepads handy and jot down details to be added to the fact list. My students made these notes:

Cockatiels can talk and learn words.

Cockatiels feet are different because they have 3 toes in the front and 1 in the back.

Cockatiels are covered with different colored feathers.

The notes that students take help them to update their *Facts Known* list. Even as the activity concluded, with a discussion of the updated fact list, the enthusiasm and accomplishment felt by my students ran high. After attentive reading, questioning, listening, and sharing of new ideas, they saw themselves, and rightly so, as *competent communicators.*

Carol Hittleman, Dix Hills, New York

Our Very Own Dragons

"Would you like a dragon for a pet?" When you ask this question of first graders, you are likely to hear a lively debate covering the pros and cons of dragon ownership. This question and others introduce students to an activity integrating reading, discussing, writing, and art, an activity that gives them a chance to create their very own dragons.

Students' imaginations are stimulated when they read books about dragons. As they plan and construct their own Play-Doh dragons, they find it natural to talk and write about what they are doing. By writing as well as they can without worrying about spelling, sentence structure, or handwriting, they take full advantage of what they know about language. As an added benefit, a group reading session helps students to discover that they are capable of reading their own writings to their classmates.

Introduce the activity by asking students such questions as:

Do any of you have pets?

Would you like a dragon as a pet?

What special powers do dragons have?

If you had a dragon, what would you and the dragon do for fun?

After students share some of their own ideas about dragons, pass around several storybooks that feature dragons. A book such as Tomi de Paolo's *The Knight and the Dragon* (Putnam, 1980) may be best

used in a small group, where students can work through the simple text at their own pace and talk about the meaning of each picture. Students may want to examine other books such as Jack Kent's *There's No Such Thing as a Dragon* (Golden Press, 1975) and Ned Delaney's *One Dragon to Another* (Houghton Mifflin, 1979) and then hear these books read aloud.

Spend a little time discussing the books, asking students how dragons are presented in each book, and finding out what they liked best in each. Then ask students to create their own dragons. Student volunteers can help you pass out portions of Play-Doh or homemade clay (the recipe can be found in most primary craft guides), pipe cleaners, pasta twists, split green peas, and dried beans.

As students shape and decorate their dragons, the comments they make among themselves are likely to be about the things that their dragons can do and about the various body features that they are giving their dragons. Encourage them to talk too about how their dragons will be similar to or different from the dragons in the books.

When students finish constructing their dragons, give them a chance to put down in writing some of the ideas that they discussed as they worked. Whether students want to write stories, paragraphs, or captions for drawings, make sure that they don't worry too much about spelling or neatness. Have crayons and markers on hand so that students can illustrate their papers, and encourage them to share their work with classmates sitting nearby. Then when students have recorded all that they want to say about their dragons, they can gather together on a reading rug (or the equivalent) and take turns reading their stories aloud and showing their drawings. Students should be able to read almost all of what they've written (though some may stumble a bit at first), and they obviously enjoy the chance to communicate with an appreciative audience.

If you can obtain the use of a camera that provides instant prints, preserve the moment by taking a picture of each student with his or her clay dragon. The clay dragons can be displayed on a table at the side of the room, and the photographs and the students' writings and drawings can be posted on the bulletin board under the label "Our Very Own Dragons."

Connie Weaver, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan

Hats Off to Language Arts

Would you believe that wearing a hat in class could help you to organize your morning? Maybe I should explain. . . .

Mornings in my classroom are spent in language arts group work. Reading and writing groups meet with me on a rotating basis for conferences and advice, and at the same time that I am working with one group, other students in the class are completing other assignments at their desks. But students at their desks may not know the best time to ask for help, and I frequently feel harried trying to meet so many needs at once. This is where a hat comes in handy—it provides an easy way to let students know when I am *busy* and when I am *interruptible*.

Bring a hat to class, and tell students that when you are wearing the hat you should not be disturbed. The hat indicates that the students you are helping need your *undivided* attention (e.g., when you are giving directions, answering questions, or listening to a student read). When the students you are helping reach the point where your full attention is no longer needed, you remove the hat, showing the rest of the class that you are ready to help anyone who needs it. A hat is easy for students to see without leaving their desks, and this method allows individual students to keep working until they know you are free, as well as allowing your full attention to go to the students you are advising at the moment.

Before long, students may decide that they want to bring or make hats of their own to wear when they are engaged in an activity needing their full attention. And what better way to develop serious readers and writers than to let students be the judges of their own "interruptibility."

Paulette Proctor Harris, Augusta College, Augusta, Georgia

Helping Children Become More Responsible for Their Own Writing

As a teacher of writing, I want to help students take charge of their own writing. Seven-year-old Jenifer spent three days writing her story, "My Life." On each of seven pages she told about one year; three of those pages are reproduced in Figure 1. Each day Jenifer talked to me or to classmates about what she was writing. During these daily "conferences" she read her story, and then I or one of her classmates retold it to her, giving her the opportunity to say, "Yes, that's the way it is," or "No, you don't understand." (Telling back is important because it helps the writer to know how others understand the story.) We also tried hard not to interfere by giving our ideas. Instead, we asked questions that helped Jenifer think more about the ideas in her story and how she wrote it. These are the kinds of questions we asked:

Can you tell me more about what happened when you fell off your brother's bike?

What's it like when you roller skate?

Do you think you'll add some of the ideas you just told us?

What do you think about your story?

Which part do you think is best?

What are you going to do next with this piece of writing?

At the end of this conference, Jenifer often realized that she knew more about her topic. Through our questioning, we had nudged her to see new possibilities. She experimented with some changes, but whether or not to revise was her decision. When she felt the content of her story was the way she wanted it to be, she announced, "I'm finished."

Jenifer is now ready for an editing conference with me. As I read "My Life," I assess the writing in terms of the skills that Jenifer has demonstrated earlier. In her writing folder she has kept an ongoing list of the writing skills she has mastered—the first nine entries are shown in Figure 1. I note that she has included her name, the date, and the title; she has continued to use *'s*, periods, and *-ed*. I also observe that she has used a comma instead of *and* in this piece of writing. Since we had talked about that skill at our previous conference, I ask her to tell me about its use. "Well," she says, "when you have a list and you keep saying *and* and *and*, you can use a comma and not put in the *ands*." After this explanation, I ask if she thinks she can remember to use commas in a series all the time in her writing. She thinks she can, so she adds that skill—number 9—to the list in her writing folder. It is important for Jenifer to write the skill in words she understands because she will use this list during the editing stage of future pieces of writing.

While reading her story I also look for one appropriate new skill to teach. I choose using capital letters at the beginnings of sentences. We talk about that skill in the context of her writing. We practice together, and I ask her to check on capital letters at the beginnings of sentences in her writing. Jenifer does not add capital letters to her list of skills at this time. I cannot assume that because the skill has been taught, Jenifer will be able to apply it correctly. Instead, in her next piece of writing, I will look to see if she is capitalizing correctly. If so, she will add that skill to her list.

On future pieces of writing, Jenifer is responsible during the editing stage for paying special attention to the skills on her list, but I do not

wean I was one yeaR old I was cute Becase I had loye hair and brown eyes. I played all day and I sLep all night.
Waen I was fouR I Lerned how To ride my brother's bike. it is esy to ride hiS_bike. I rod his bike but I fell down on his bike.
When I was seven years old I Got a new par of Roller Skeats. Thay are blue wheth hed and Wiete StRaPS.
Things I Can Do

Figure 1. Pages from Jenifer's story, as well as her list of writing skills.

check for those skills until she has finished writing her story. If Jenifer has forgotten to use the skills on her list, I help her during the editing conference by saying, "Check numbers 5 and 7 on your skills list; then reread what you have written and make changes."

I am not responsible for red-penciling errors. Instead, Jenifer is given the opportunity to take increasing responsibility for her own writing and learning.

Mary Ellen Giacobbe, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Going for a Walk

While nature walks have long been part of the primary science curriculum, you may find it worthwhile to develop the theme of "Going for a Walk" into its own language unit. These activities can be adapted for use either before or after a class walk.

Read aloud to your students a book in which the main character goes on a special walk. Some possibilities are *Rosie's Walk* by Pat Hutchins (Macmillan, 1968), *Just Me* by Marie Hall Ets (Viking Press, 1965), *Spot's First Walk* by Eric Hall (Putnam, 1981), and *Four Fur Feet* by Margaret Wise Brown (Young Scott Books, 1961). Ask students, "What happens on these walks?" "Where are the characters going?" "Do they discover anything special?" "What special things might we (or did we) discover on our walk?" Students can prepare maps or murals showing the route taken and the sequence of events in one or more of the books. After the class walk, they can prepare a map showing the route and sequence of events in their own walk.

Another option is to let students pair up or form small groups and talk about walking. Ask students the following questions:

> When can we walk to our destination, and when do we have to use other means of transportation?
>
> Do you like to walk? Why or why not? How far do you think you walk every day?
>
> What do you do or think about while you walk? What do you see, hear, smell, and imagine while you walk?
>
> Do you know any people who walk for their health? In what ways is walking good for people?

To incorporate the arts, dramatize the different ways animals walk and move. Read aloud and act out the poem "Jump or Jiggle" by

Evelyn Beyer (in *Time for Poetry*, compiled by May Hill Arbuthnot and Shelton L. Root, Jr., Scott, Foresman, 1968); then help students think of ways that various animals move. Let students act out the movements of different animals to the beat of a drum. For example, you can ask students one at a time or in pairs to gambol like lambs, stalk like lions, or scamper like squirrels. Follow up this activity with the poem "About Feet" by Margaret Hillert (in *The Random House Book of Poetry for Children*, edited by Jack Prelutsky, Random House, 1983). Ask students, "How many feet do spiders have?" "How many feet do centipedes have?" (Spiders have eight, and centipedes, despite popular misconceptions, can have from 15 to over 180 pairs of legs.) Then discuss the many ways that people can move with their feet. List verbs on the board—*hop, march, skip, run, jump, leap, parade,* and others. After making a long list, you can ask for a volunteer to choose one of the words on the list and, without telling the rest of the class what it is, to move across the room demonstrating that word. The rest of the class can guess which word the student picked, and then another student may demonstrate a different verb.

Think of reasons to go on walks around your school, encouraging students to observe their surroundings carefully. We went for a "green walk" in September to see what was green. We went on a "changes walk" in October. Students noticed that the oak and maple leaves and the acorns had changed color, but the grass and evergreens were still green. At another time we may go on a "funny shape walk" where we look for funny shapes, or on a walk where we look for things that move or don't move. Or we may go on a "space walk" and pretend there is no gravity. Students have also suggested "flower walks" and "bug walks." What kind of walk will you and your students take? Let your imaginations roam.

Jeanette Throne, Shaker Heights School District, Shaker Heights, Ohio

Painting the Months

This activity combines reading and discussion with drawing and painting, letting students respond to selected books with expressions of their own creativity. I share three books about different times of the year with my primary students and then let them create their own calendar pictures and descriptions of the months.

First we read Mitsumasa Anno's *Anno's Counting Book* (Crowell, 1977), a wordless picture book showing different months of the year.

Because of the tiny details, I share the book in small groups. I use the questions listed below to start discussion.

> What do you feel when you look at this picture?
>
> What is the artist trying to tell us?
>
> What clues does the artist give?
>
> Why are there twelve pictures?
>
> Which parts do you like best?
>
> If the artist asked you to write something to go along with this picture, what would you write?

The second book we read is *All Year Long* by Nancy Tafuri (Greenwillow Books, 1983), a book with large print and simple illustrations. I ask students if they can guess from the title what the story will be about, and I again ask students to tell me what the pictures make them think of and feel.

The third calendar book I read to students is Bill Martin, Jr.'s *The Turning of the Year* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), which has interesting abstract paintings and short rhymes. I ask students to point out the paintings they like best and to explain why. I point out my own favorites as well.

Students compare the three books and vote for the book they liked best. Then I provide construction paper and paint, set up several painting tables where five or six students can paint at one time, and ask students to create their own paintings for calendar books, beginning with the fall months. (If your class has only a day or two to spend on this activity, students can be asked to paint pictures for the current or next month. As a variation, you could have students work in groups on different months, and display the finished paintings and descriptions as a mural of the months.)

Each student chooses a different color of paper for each month and for the cover. To generate ideas, we talk first about the special things we do at different times of the year, the sequence of months, and what kinds of changes we see outside as the months change. I list the months on the board so that students can paint or print the names of the months on their finished paintings, and I place a calendar on a side table to help students put their completed months in order.

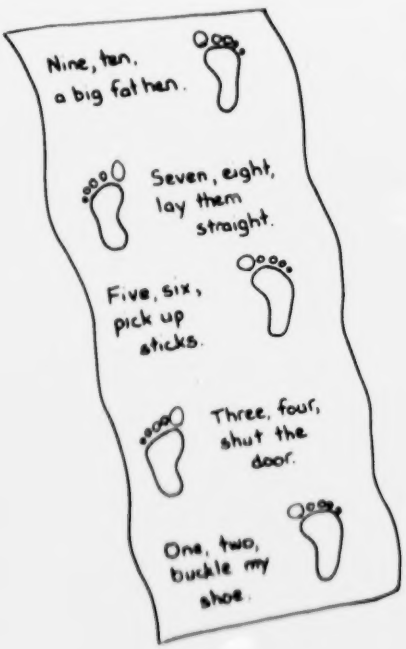
After finishing their paintings, students write matching descriptions on separate sheets of paper. The sheets of paper should be small enough to fit on the back of the paintings. After about three weeks of painting and writing, during which I confer with students about their writing and collect their descriptions and paintings for safekeeping, each of

my students has completed twelve calendar paintings and descriptions, one set for every month. I help each student check to see that the months are in order before we bind the paintings and cover pages into calendar books, using a paper punch and yarn. The paintings are all bound face up so that we can glue each month's description on the back of the previous page and have it face the appropriate painting. The description for January goes on the back of the calendar's cover. After my students practice reading their calendar books, they read the books aloud and share the illustrations during "author's time."

Arlene Chenoweth, Denver, Colorado

Foot Book

While visiting the Cambridge Literacy Center in Massachusetts, I came across a novel way to introduce students to poetry. I have since used several "foot books" in my own classroom.



To make a foot book, choose a poem that uses rhyming couplets or triplets. Cut a strip of kraft paper about sixteen inches wide and long enough for the poem. (If necessary, paper grocery bags can be pieced together.)

Draw child-sized footprints along the strip of paper, spaced comfortably so that a student can take one step at a time. Starting at the bottom of the strip of paper, print a verse of the poem in large letters to the side of each footprint. Students then take turns walking through the foot book, reciting each verse in turn while standing on the footprint next to it. Students may want to walk in pairs, one helping the other to maintain balance. Foot books can be rolled up, stored, and used again and again.

Margaret Y. Phinney, Smith College Campus School, Northampton, Massachusetts

Natural Choices

To develop students' sensitivity to nature, try reading the book suggested below with your students. *Blueberries for Sal* describes an afternoon outing during which Sal and her mother pick berries for canning, and may be used to introduce the topic of how people prepare for winter.

> *Blueberries for Sal* by Robert McClosky (Viking Press, 1948)
> Suggested grade level: K–3

Blueberries for Sal has not lost its appeal since its publication in 1948. I have found the book useful as a starting point for developing concepts about the seasons.

As soon as students were settled in our story circle, I read the title and asked, "Where do you think Sal will find blueberries?" Responses ranged from "at the store" or "in her pancakes" to "on blueberry bushes." Many students had never picked blueberries and did not know what a blueberry bush looked like. After letting students examine the cover illustration showing Sal surrounded by blueberry bushes, I asked, "What time of year do you think it is?" I encouraged students to explain what clues from the picture they had used in making their decisions.

Next, we studied the book's endpapers, which show Sal and her mother canning berries. Most students were not familiar with the canning process, so I explained how the pictured items are used in canning. Then I read the story aloud and invited students to share their responses. During the discussion, I focused attention on the value

of canning by asking such questions as "Why did Sal's mother want to can the blueberries?" and "What did Sal's mother mean when she said, 'Then we will have food for the winter'?" Students will have fun learning the harvest-time line, "We eat what we can, and what we can't, we can."

When students had grasped the idea that canning is one way to prepare for winter, I asked, "What are some other ways to get ready for winter?" Here are a few responses, which I listed on an easel pad:

We put up our storm windows.

We get out our mittens, boots, jackets, and sweaters.

We buy firewood for the fireplace.

Mom and Dad put snow tires on the car.

We buy cocoa.

Daddy brings down our ice skates from the attic.

Our list building led to a discussion of the distinguishing features of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. My next question, "How do people get ready for spring?" stimulated discussion and the making of another list. At this point we were ready to record a definition of each season that would include the season's special characteristics, the time of year when it occurs, and the ways it can be distinguished from other seasons.

Turning back to the book, I asked students to explain the words of Little Bear's mother on page 18: "Little Bear," she said, "eat lots of berries and grow big and fat. We must store up food for the long winter." This question led to an exploration of the meanings of the words *storage, store, preserve, freeze, refrigerator, refrigerate,* and *save.* We also talked about the way bears prepare for winter.

Finally, I held up the familiar book *Frederick* by Leo Lionni (Pantheon, 1967) and asked, "What do other animals do to get ready for winter?" I used this question as the introduction to a new unit of study. We were now ready to explore fiction and nonfiction to learn about animals and their adjustments to the changing seasons.

Joy F. Moss, Harley School, Rochester, New York

It's in the Mail

My first-grade students are always eager to tell me about their families, friends, and experiences. I found a simple way to transfer some of this eagerness to the writing process.

I purchased a mailbox at a hardware store, painted and lettered it with our room number and school's name, and nailed it to a post that I secured next to my desk. (If you prefer, set the mailbox on a chair next to your desk.) I encouraged students to write about their experiences and to deliver their writings to me by placing the writings in the mailbox.

The mailbox issued an irresistible invitation, and the amount of writing my students did increased almost immediately. Another advantage to this idea is that I was able to show students that I enjoy writing, too. I drafted short notes and stories to my students, making sure that each student received one every week or two. A student mail carrier delivered my notes at the end of the school day.

I checked the mailbox during the day, read the writings enclosed, jotted brief responses to students, and filed students' writings in individual file folders kept in a large box near my desk. These writings came in handy later on when I assigned a personal writing and some students couldn't think of anything to write about. They were able to review the contents of their folders for ideas and for raw material on which to expand.

This idea made writing so popular with my students that I went so far as to extend writing into the summer months, offering students the chance to write letters to me about their summertime adventures. The results undoubtedly outweighed the cost of returning short notes to those students who communicated with me.

Maurine C. Whitney, Houston, Texas

Learning about Measurement

Introduce a kindergartner or first grader to the concept of measurement by observing the length of hands. First, distribute sheets of paper and pencils and ask every student to trace around one hand—from the base of the palm to the fingertips and back to the base of the palm. Ask students to keep their fingers together while tracing and to draw a straight line on the outline across the base of the palm where the wrist starts. Instruct each student to cut out his or her handprint.

Hold up one student's hand outline and say, "We are going to call the distance from fingertip to the base of the palm *one hand.* That means that anything the length of a hand is one hand long." Then use the outline of your own hand to measure the width of your desk, demonstrating how students can measure objects in the classroom. Show students how to begin measuring by placing the hand outline so

that the fingertips touch one end of the desk. As you measure, show students how to lift up and replace the outline carefully, keeping track of the previous position with a forefinger or pencil. Count aloud as you measure, and then ask students, "How many hands long is my desk?"

Students may use their own hand outlines to measure the width, length, or depth of other objects in the classroom, such as a window, door, poster, or sink. Point out that some objects measured will not be an even number of hands long; for instance, a desk might turn out to be ten and a half hands long or five and a half hands wide.

You may want to list on the chalkboard a number of possible objects to be measured, and to ask students to keep track of the measurements they record for each of the items listed. Students will record different measurements for the same object, allowing you to point out that everyone's hand is a different size and to explain a bit of the history of measurement. The *foot*, for instance, varied in length from twelve to twenty-four inches until a standard was decided on. The *cubit*, an ancient unit of measure, was measured from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger and was usually equal to between eighteen and twenty-one inches. The *yard* is said to have been the distance from the tip of the nose to the tip of the outstretched fingers. Ask students, "Why might problems come up if everyone measured things in a different way? How might it create problems for people constructing buildings? for people packaging food? for people sewing clothes?"

Adapted from an idea by Andreii Moody, Corona, Queens, New York

The Strangest Animals

I relate storytime to a unit on animals by reading aloud a special assortment of books. While we pursue the facts in science, we enjoy the imaginary in our story corner. We read the following books on the theme of strange animals:

Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak (Harper and Row, 1984)

Clifford, the Big Red Dog by Norman Bridwell (Scholastic, 1985)

Dandelion by Don Freeman (Penguin, 1977)

Harry and the Terrible Whatzit by Dick Gackenbach (Houghton Mifflin, 1984)

The Aminal by Lorna Balian (Abingdon, 1972)

The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle (Putnam, 1981)

After discussion of the special animals we read about, I ask my first graders to imagine that they each have a strange animal living in their house. Each student is to draw a picture of this animal and then to describe it on a separate sheet of paper. I collect the drawings and descriptions at the end of the class period.

The next day, I put all the drawings on display and select a "seeker." I choose a description at random and read it aloud, and the seeker must find the drawing that matches it. When the first drawing has been identified, the creator of that animal collects his or her drawing and description and is appointed the next seeker. I read the descriptions one at a time until all the animals have been identified and all the students have collected their work.

If the seeker can't match a description with a drawing, he or she can ask the class for help. "The description says the animal has a long blue tail, but I can't find a drawing that shows that." Often we find that a description mentions something not included in the drawing or that a drawing has something important added. Students enjoy looking for discrepancies. Once the animal is identified, they offer suggestions on how the artist/author could have made the drawing and the description match better.

Donna Browning, Northampton Elementary School, Spring, Texas

A Look at Trees

Just outside our building stand three oak trees. The students walk by them every day. One Monday morning I took my students outside, and we all sat on the lawn near the middle tree. We looked at the oak carefully and shared observations.

> The bark changes from the bottom to the top.
>
> There's a branch with no leaves. Some branches are longer than others.
>
> All the leaves are not the same size.
>
> Some branches go straight out and some point up.
>
> This tree has acorns.

As I listened, I recorded students' comments.

Next I asked students to look at some nearby maple trees and to note differences between oaks and maples. Two of the easiest differences

to spot were leaf shape and color. (At the time, the maple leaves were turning bright red-orange and the oak leaves were changing to brown.)

Back in our room, I made a chart from a 6″ × 2″ piece of oaktag. At the top I wrote the title *Trees Help Us*. On separate sheets of paper students wrote and drew their ideas about ways in which trees help us. One student drew a picture of children watching squirrels in a nest high in a tree. Another drew squirrels eating acorns. Students wrote such comments as "I like to see the orange leaves," "Trees give us shade," and "Your tree plants its babies in our garden."

I wanted to help students learn to identify oaks, maples, and buckeyes. (Oaks and maples grow in profusion in our area, and the buckeye is our state tree.) I gathered leaves from each and brought them to class. That afternoon we sat in a circle on the rug and put all of the leaves in the center. I took out one of each type, identifed them, and asked what differences students noticed. They then worked together to separate the leaves into groups by tree type.

The next day I cut a 3″ × 12″ strip of paper to be used for a forest mural. I divided the strip into three sections and labeled them *Oaks*, *Maples*, and *Buckeyes*. Students painted trunks and branches in each of these sections. After the paint dried, students taped the separated leaves onto branches in the appropriate sections, making a colorful fall scene.

I plan to use this activity again in the winter and spring. In the winter we'll examine three evergreens, looking at the size and shape of the needles. In the spring we'll again observe oaks, maples, and buckeyes, but we'll focus on new growth. After observing and discussing trees in different stages of the growth cycle, students will be more aware of the kinds of trees around them and of the changes that take place in their environment from season to season.

June Bailey, Mercer Elementary School, Shaker Heights, Ohio

Intermediate—Making Meaning: Integrating the Language Arts

Framing

Children need to realize that when they read or write or draw, they assume a certain "point of view." They are "framing" language or art in their own unique ways.

Drawing a still life—an arrangement of inanimate objects—is a good way to begin. First, you will need frames cut from pieces of cardboard that are roughly 9 × 12 inches. In the middle of the cardboard, cut a rectangular hole about 4½ × 6 inches.

Next arrange plants, books, fruit, masks, stuffed animals, and other objects for your still life on a table in the center of the room. Have paper and chalk or other drawing materials ready for the children to use.

As you introduce the activity to your students, have them hold the frames to their eyes and move the frames around as if taking pictures of different objects: desks, windows, trees outside the room, and classmates. Talk about what happens when objects are viewed from closer or farther away, or when frames are turned vertically or horizontally.

Now have students sit in a circle around the still life. As they look at the arrangement through their frames, they should decide how much of the still life they want to draw and what parts they want to show. Each student chooses a point of view before starting to draw.

As the students draw, they should pay attention to the whole picture as well as how the different objects fit together. Share the completed drawings, looking carefully at differences in style and content in the choices each student has made. Point out how even similar points of view produce strikingly different drawings.

After students have examined the differences in art, move on to "framing" in reading and writing. To highlight this concept, use a story which clearly assumes a particular point of view. Examine together (1) the point of view of the character who tells the story, (2) how this one point of view affects the story, and (3) what would be different if another character told the story. Students could even try rewriting the story from another point of view.

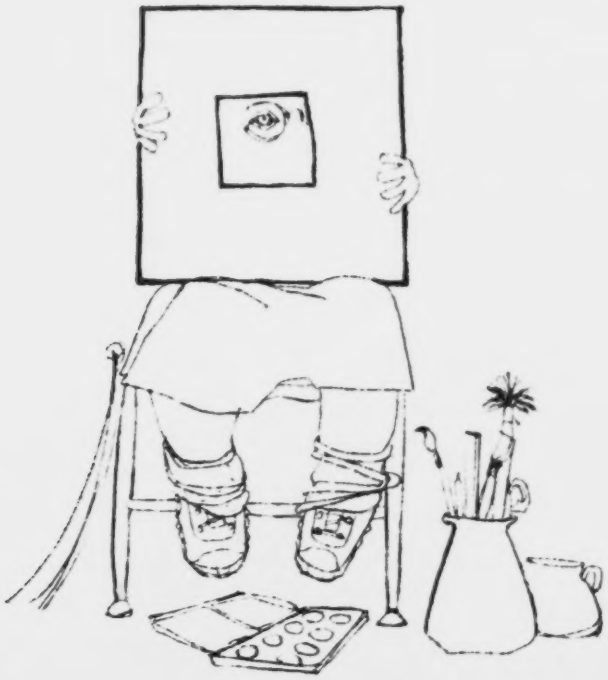


Illustration by Louise Krauss

A good story to use at the intermediate level is Deborah and James Howe's *Bunnicula: A Rabbit Tale of Mystery* (Atheneum, 1979). Although written from the point of view of a dog named Harold, the story could easily be rewritten from the viewpoint of Bunnicula the vampire bunny. After students have "looked" with their new "frame," share ideas aloud or exchange papers for silent reading. Ask how and why one student's writing differs from another's even if they have both chosen the point of view of the same character. Encourage students to ask each other about their choices.

By drawing and writing with a "frame," students become more aware of how each person sees the world from a unique point of view.

Linda K. Crafton, Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, Illinois. She credits Cynthia Weiss.

Putting It All Together

It is often said that the easiest place to begin writing is with a familiar subject. Using the steps suggested below, you can help students at any level learn this for themselves. I created this lesson plan after observing Donald Graves in the classroom and reading his book *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* (Heinemann, 1982).

1. Open the discussion by sharing a personal experience. Ask students if anything similar has ever happened to them. As students describe their own experiences, summarize out loud what you learn about your students, such as "I learned that Katie got into mischief eating donuts, and I know that Christin was stranded with her family on a superhighway."
2. Next, give every student a sheet of paper. Ask students to number the page from one to three and to write down three topics, either experiences they have had or things they know about. (With primary students, you might limit the topics to one, and encourage them to concentrate on writing what they want to say as best as they can rather than worrying about spelling or handwriting.) Topics should be just a few words, such as "I had a bike wreck," "I am an expert on goldfish," or "We stayed at my cousin's house." Jot down three topics of your own as well. After a few minutes, walk around the classroom and check to see that everyone has written at least one topic. If a student is having trouble, stop and hold a quick conference, asking questions to help the student think of possibilities. You might ask, "How about your birthday? Is there something about that day you could list? What was the most exciting trip you ever took? Could you tell about some time you were sick, or some time when friends or relatives stayed with you?"
3. Read your own topics out loud to your students and tell a little bit about what happened in each experience and why you listed the topics you did. Then match students with partners and ask them to do what you just did—to tell a little about each experience on their lists and why it was chosen.
4. Read your own three topics out loud again, announce which one you have selected to write about, and tell why you chose it. For example, "I've decided to write about the time I caught a snake at Girl Scout camp. I remember how exciting it was when I

found the snake, and if I write about the event maybe I'll be able to remember even more details."

5. Ask students to select one of their topics to write about and tell them not to worry about spelling. Let them know that you will be writing too. Distribute sheets of writing paper. Ask students not to interrupt you or each other during the first few minutes of writing time. Explain that you and they need time to get off to a good start, and that soon you will come around to see how everyone is doing.
6. After you have written for a few minutes, visit with individual students at their desks. Ask students how their writing is going, what they are going to say next, what information might still need to be included, and so on. Try to find something to say about each student's writing. If some students finish writing on one topic, they can begin on another topic.
7. After a set amount of time—fifteen or twenty minutes for older students, five or ten minutes for younger ones—ask students to arrange their desks in a circle or to sit in a circle on the rug. Read part of your story to the class and let students ask questions. Ask them questions such as the following:

   What part of my story did you like best?

   Is there anything you would like to know that I didn't include?

   Is there any part you would like me to work on more?

   Then let student volunteers read their stories and respond to questions in the same way you did. If enough students are interested in reading their stories aloud, you might want to divide the class into several groups so that everyone who wants to has the opportunity.
8. After the stories are read aloud, they can be placed in individual writing folders and kept at students' desks or in a box in a central location. Encourage students to think of the rough drafts in their writing folders as promising stories that may later be revised and made into books.

Jill Dillard, Summit Elementary, Cincinnati, Ohio

Getting Acquainted with Computers

Considering the widespread use of computers for business, pleasure, and everything in between, it seems natural for students to show an

interest in anything computer-related. Rather than simply letting your students pick up bits and pieces of information from advertisements and older siblings, give them a legitimate opportunity to talk, listen, write, and generally feel comfortable about computers.

In the following activity, which can be used with any age group, students describe what they already know about computers, pose questions to "experts," and categorize what they find out. This activity provides students with a smooth introduction to computers because at all times—in the verbal brainstorming, in talking over new information, and in updating idea cards—student interest directs the learning process. And whether a student is a recent initiate or a confirmed computer hacker, an idea exchange such as this one invariably offers something new to think about.

Prepare for this activity by contacting several computer "experts." These could be knowledgeable parents or other teachers who might volunteer to bring their personal computers into the classroom, or reliable teenage computer enthusiasts who would be flattered to serve as "experts." Ask them to set aside a class period to participate in a question-and-answer session and to be ready to explain how a computer functions as well as to answer more speculative or detailed questions.

A group brainstorming is a good way to introduce the topic of computers to the class. Ask students to take ten or fifteen minutes to generate computer-related words, ideas, or information using questions such as the following for inspiration:

- How often do you come in contact with computers? (Possible answers: grocery store checkouts, kitchen appliances, school heating system, car computers, computers that produce goods in factories)
- How are computers useful? (They free people to do other things, allow people to avoid dangerous tasks, speed tedious jobs, reduce error, etc.)

As students provide facts and comments, write each student's ideas and the student's name on a 3″ × 5″ "idea card." After the brainstorming session, distribute the cards to the students who originated the information and draw columns on the board with such headings as: *What a computer can do, Parts of a computer, How to use a computer,* etc. Each student then uses masking tape to place his or her idea card in the proper column on the board. This collage of idea cards represents what the students already know about computers. As part of this initial discussion, ask students to think about what life would be like without computers. If there is sufficient student interest, you may want to provide a special *What if* column on the board for these speculations.

Next, ask students to form small groups and prepare questions to ask the experts. They should feel free to prepare nonfactual questions, such as "Do you think computers will be used more in teaching in the future?" Each group comes up with four or five questions, and one student from each group reads the group's questions aloud to the class so that duplicate questions can be avoided.

The second class period is devoted to the question-and-answer session with the visiting experts. You might set aside the first half of the period as a whole group session and then divide the class into as many groups as there are experts, letting each expert preside over a more in-depth discussion of the student questions. As students talk with the experts, they write down any fact or bit of information that they find especially interesting, or anything that contradicts what they thought about computers. If the experts have any demonstrations or diagrams that they would like to show, let them present the information at the start of the class period.

During the third period, students share what they wrote down during the previous session. After talking about any new information they learned, they take their idea cards down from the board and revise or rewrite them if necessary. As a last step, the updated idea cards are placed again in the proper columns and student volunteers are chosen to read the information in the columns of the final collage.

Donna Wiseman, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas

A Post Office Unit: Vowelville

Transforming a classroom into a post office for four or five weeks provides the opportunity for many different types of learning.

It takes about a week to prepare for the opening of the "Vowelville Post Office." I begin the week by asking questions to find out what students know about how our postal system started and how it operates today. We talk about the Pony Express, zip codes, and the tasks performed by such postal workers as mail carriers, sorters, mail truck drivers, cancellation machine operators, window clerks, post office box clerks, superintendents of delivery, and postmasters. A table at the side of the room can be used to display such books as the following:

> *Mr. Zip and the U.S. Mail* by Jene Barr (Albert Whitman, 1964)
>
> *The Post Office Book* by Gail Gibbons (Thomas Y. Crowell, 1982)
>
> *Careers with the Postal Service* by Johanna Petersen (Lerner Publications, 1975)

First Class! The Postal System in Action by Harold Roth (Pantheon, 1983)

The Story of the Pony Express by R. Conrad Stein (Regensteiner Publishing Enterprises, 1981)

The Story of the Pony Express: Heroes on Horseback by Tom West (Four Winds Press, 1969)

Next I distribute copies of a classroom diagram and a Vowelville address sheet. (See partial sample on page 26.)

Then I introduce the parts of a letter—greeting, body, closing, and signature. I ask students to write practice letters and address envelopes using Vowelville addresses. A sample address might be:

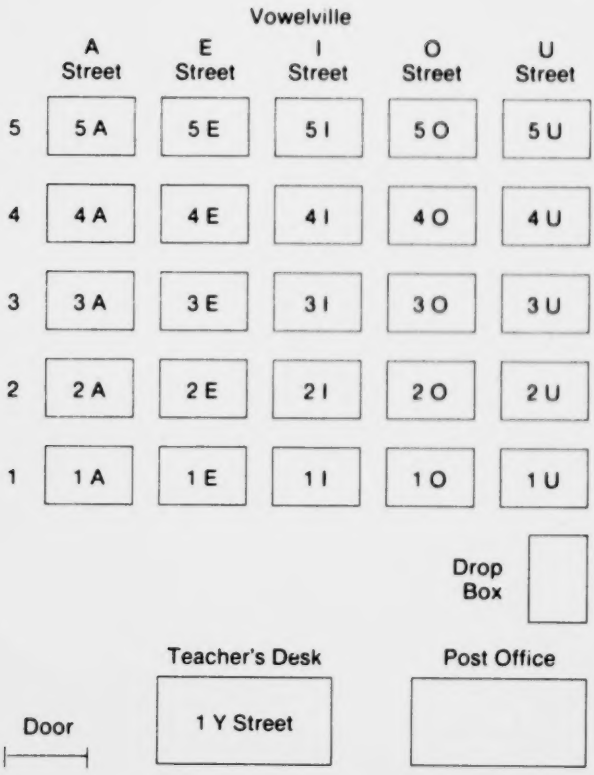
Andrew Lucci
4 U Street
Vowelville, OH 45056

Each student needs a desktop mailbox for letters received. I ask students to make these at home by covering shoe boxes or tissue boxes with wrapping paper and printing their Vowelville address on each side. I cut a slot in the lid of a larger box and decorate it for use as the Vowelville drop box. Students also need to stock the post office with stamps (made by illustrating and cutting construction paper) and envelopes.

Math time during this preparation week is devoted to "Post Office Math." I distribute play five-dollar bills and coins and have students perform simple transactions that might be necessary in using the postal system. For example, I ask students to figure the cost for a given number of stamps (at the current price for first-class stamps) and envelopes (at 5 cents each) and to subtract the total cost from the amount given the window clerk to determine the amount of change.

On grand opening day, complete with balloons and streamers, students enter not a classroom but the town of Vowelville. The desks in the classroom are arranged in five rows, each marked with a street sign: A, E, I, O, or U Street. A table and three chairs have been placed at the side of the room to serve as the Vowelville Post Office. The Vowelville drop box is located on a chair or empty desk near the post office. A large bulletin board proclaims "Welcome to Vowelville."

Jobs need to be assigned before the Vowelville Post Office can begin operation. I explain the jobs as described below and post a chart to help keep track of who is performing what job. Once or twice a day, the students assigned to be Postmaster, Window Clerk, and Cancellation Machine Operator move to chairs at the post office to do their jobs. (The Mail Carriers are alerted when the mail is ready to be delivered.)



Addresses for Vowelville, OH 45056

Kerri Berry	1 A Street
Renee Evens	2 A Street
Jessica Grensing	3 A Street
. . . . .	
Andrew Lucci	4 U Street
Josh Myers	5 U Street
Mrs. Jones	1 Y Street

Figure 1. Classroom diagram and Vowelville address sheet.

Different students can be assigned every few days so that every student has a chance to participate.

> *Window Clerk:* The Window Clerk sells stamps and envelopes and makes change with play money.
>
> *Postmaster:* The Postmaster picks up the mail from the Vowelville drop box, sorts letters by street into five sorting bins (empty ice cream containers), and gives them to the Cancellation Machine Operator.
>
> *Cancellation Machine Operator:* The Cancellation Machine Operator cancels the stamps on the letters using an ink pad stamp or a crayon and places the letters in a box to be picked up by the Mail Carriers.
>
> *Mail Carriers:* The five Mail Carriers (one per street) deliver the letters. (One of the five Mail Carriers can be asked to deliver the teacher's mail to 1 Y Street.)

After jobs have been assigned, students are ready to begin writing letters. As they complete letters, they deposit them in the drop box. I remind students that letters can be used for a variety of purposes: to ask a question, to explain something, or just to say hello. I encourage students to respond to all the letters they receive. Sign-up sheets or assigned letter-writing partners can supplement voluntary letter writing to ensure that no student is left out.

I write and receive letters along with my students. I use my involvement as an opportunity to write congratulations, to answer questions, and to help motivate their letter writing. I make sure I have written every student by the end of the unit.

An appropriate way to end the unit is to take students on a trip to the local post office. (Since I do this activity just before Valentine's Day, I have each student take along a preaddressed, stamped valentine to mail.) Students are given a short tour of the post office, where they have a chance to see how our classroom postal system compares to the real thing. Upon returning to school, students write thank-you letters to the postmaster.

Florence Jones, Kramer Elementary School, Oxford, Ohio

Class History

At the close of each day, I ask my third graders to take a few minutes to reflect upon the events of the day and to suggest short phrases for

the "name of the day." After I list several possible names on the chalkboard, such as "The Day Roxanne Brought Her Kitten to School" and "The Day the Mime Came," we vote on one. This name is recorded on a large calendar posted on the bulletin board.

Many names for the day honor an accomplishment or event associated with a particular child, such as "The Day Nathaniel Received a Letter from the President," "The Day Carrie Came In with a Cast on Her Leg," "The Day Peter's Cat Died." Names that commemorate group events or group jokes draw us together as a class community—"The Day of Our Poetry Celebration," "The Day Mrs. Whitin Pretended She Was Perseus." When visitors come to our class, students always lead them first to our calendar of named days.

As each month ends, I add the most recent calendar to a large class book kept in the classroom library. Students often reread it alone or with friends, giggling and pointing as they recall events—"Remember the day when . . . ?" In June I will bring out the completed calendar—our history of the school year—and reflect with my students on the many accomplishments and activities we shared together.

Phyllis Whitin, Columbia, South Carolina

Folktale Pantomimes

Share a scary folktale with your students. Choose a tale that features a dragon, a troll, or a giant. After you have read or told the story, use some creative drama to help your students enter the imaginary world. Imagine, for example, that the heroine of the story was picking raspberries for her mother, who had told her not to wander off the path. Begin by asking your students to pantomime picking raspberries. They can sit right at their desks or move about the room—whatever you feel more comfortable with and they are able to handle.

Then suggest that a frog or butterfly or some other irresistible creature passes by. Your students are distracted from their berry picking, begin to follow the fascinating creature, and soon leave the path. If you prefer your students to pantomime this scene at their seats, simply ask them to follow the frog or butterfly with their eyes, head, and upper torso.

Now suggest that the creature has gone into the deep dark woods. Your students follow, pushing vines aside, stepping over fallen logs, and pulling cobwebs out of their hair. Since this is all done in pantomime, there should be no sound, and each youngster can concentrate on his or her own scene.

Finally, suggest to your students that they come upon the dragon (or troll or giant). The large beast does not see them, so they quickly hide and observe. Once again all action is in pantomime and can be done at desks if you wish.

Now that the children have pantomimed, talk about what they did (and why), what they saw, and how they felt. What distracted them? What did the woods look like? What did the dragon (or troll or giant) look like? Make a list of the words or phrases describing the beast.

Students now have the motivation and a pool of possible words and ideas to write a story about "what happened when I went into the deep dark woods," to write a news-type article describing the beast, or to write a poem about feelings upon entering the woods. This basic story-pantomime-write technique can be used with many different types of stories to produce writing rich in imagery and detail.

Carol Ann Piggins, director of Creative Education Associates, Racine, Wisconsin.

Book Commercials

In *The Read-Aloud Handbook* (rev. ed., Penguin, 1985), Jim Trelease makes the point that if we as teachers want to sell children on reading, we would do well to use the same techniques Madison Avenue uses. The main technique Trelease discusses is the commercial. I have used "book commercials" in my classroom almost daily for the past three years. The basic steps are:

1. Present one book commercial a day to your class for several days. Keep each commercial to a minute or two. Explain what goes into a book commercial—title, author's name, and enough of the plot to create a sense of anticipation. Tell students that a good way to sell a book is to describe the events leading up to an exciting part of the story, stop, and then say, "That's all I'm going to tell you. You'll need to read the book yourself to find out what happens next."
2. Ask your students to select books to sell to the class. Students can either choose books from the library and have you approve them or choose books from a selection you bring to class. I include in my selection such popular titles as *Freckle Juice* by Judy Blume (Four Winds Press, 1971), *Blubber* by Judy Blume (Dell, 1974), *Nothing's Fair in Fifth Grade* by Barthe DeClements (Viking, 1981), and *The Indian in the Cupboard* by Lynne Reid

Banks (Doubleday, 1981). Students each choose a book, read it, and prepare a one- to two-minute book commercial. As you schedule the presentation of commercials, keep in mind that limiting them to one a day keeps interest high.

3. After presenting a commercial, the student should ask, "Who wants to read the book next?" and pass the book to an interested student. What an improvement over book talks in which the librarian creates interest in a particular book and then leaves *with* the book! Here's how one student encouraged classmates to read her book:

> The name of my book is *The Indian in the Cupboard.* It was written by Lynne Reid Banks. The main character is a boy named Omri. The story takes place probably around the present time. It starts out when Omri gets a cupboard for his birthday and discovers that things put inside the cupboard come to life. He leaves a toy Indian in the cupboard overnight and in the morning the plastic Indian has turned into a real live man only three inches tall. The problem is that the Indian, who says his name is Little Bear, starts demanding things like a fire, meat, blankets, a place to live, and an Indian wife.
>
> If you want to find out how Omri finds these things for Little Bear and also what happens when Omri's friend Patrick puts a cowboy in the cupboard, along with his horse and gun, you'll have to read the book. Who wants to borrow *The Indian in the Cupboard* first?

For added motivation, plan a bulletin board display related to the reading activity. Let students add stickers or paper cutouts to the display after presenting commercials. The current display in my classroom is titled "We Have a Whale of a Good Time Reading." It features a steadily growing pod of whales swimming across an ocean. On each whale is printed a book title, the author's name, and the name of the student who presented the commmercial for that book.

Sharron Helmholz, Cupertino Union School District, Santa Clara, California

Making a "What Is It?" Book

The format of a riddle book can help students feel more comfortable making and using dictated stories. In making a "What Is It?" book, students examine and make observations about a familiar object and read aloud to a group.

I began by setting an orange on a table at the front of the room. I asked students to look at the orange carefully and to describe it to me, prompting their observations by asking, "What colors do you see?" "What shape is it?" "How would you describe its surface?" I elicited at least one response from each student and listed each response, along with the name of the contributor, on the chalkboard under the heading *Looks*. I repeated this process for the other senses, passing the orange around the room so that students could feel it, smell it, and so on, until we had produced a chart that included the following responses:

Looks	Feels	Smells	Sounds	Tastes
green and orange	hard	like a flower	like your pants tearing	juicy
seed looks like a rock	like a ball	sweet	sounds crunchy and like thunder	little bit sour
has veins in the white part	like a couch inside the peel	spicy	sounds like an egg hatching and like clothes tearing	sweet
white part looks like snow	cold on your tongue		like rocks coming down	good
white part looks like skin	sticky		like little bubbles	cold
yellow	squirts in your mouth			drippy
it rolls	soft and heavy			kind of sour
	wobbly			
	hard in your mouth			

Next I explained that we were going to use the students' comments to make a class riddle book about the orange. I helped students read and review the list on the chalkboard and turn their comments into sentences. Students' changes and additions were recorded on the chalkboard. Then each student copied his or her sentences from the board onto a separate sheet of paper, printing as clearly as possible. (When using this activity with younger students, you may want to copy students' revised sentences for them onto the pages.)

To create the book, I cut circular pages out of orange construction paper and wrote "What Is It?" on a cover page. We glued the pages of sentences onto the circular sheets of the book, putting all of the

sentences contributed by any one student on the same page. For instance, page one of our book read, "Rene said, 'The juice is shiny on my arm. It's slippery like ice.' " Page two read, "Debbie said, 'It sounds crunchy. It has veins in the white part.' " On the last page I printed, "It is an orange!" Students drew pictures to be inserted opposite their sentences. (I pointed out that they should avoid drawing the object itself since we didn't want the readers to guess the riddle right away.) Then I bound the pages into a book.

I made enough photocopies of our book so that every student could have one. After I read the book aloud once, I asked students to practice reading it aloud to each other. When students felt ready, I arranged for my class to visit a nearby class and to read the book aloud, with each student reading his or her own page.

Additional subjects that I have used for riddle books are an apple, a football, a basketball, a roll of toilet paper (I copied the comments onto one long strip of paper and rolled it up), a pencil, and an eraser. (If you use a food item, bring enough so that all students can have a taste after the chart of comments is complete.) I also found this activity adaptable to the study of different subjects—for instance, a "Who Is It?" book can be made about a historical figure.

Lynn Rothwell, Pensacola, Florida

Talking about Pictures

About 80 percent of the information we process comes to us through our eyes. We are surrounded by pictures, yet we don't necessarily know how to look at, understand, or respond to them. One simple way to help students to analyze what they see is to have them compare, contrast, and describe different picture versions of the same folktale. Many fairy tales are available in several versions, so check your school library for appropriate tales to select.

I start with two editions of *Peter and the Wolf,* one illustrated by Erna Voigt (Godine, 1980) and the other illustrated by Charles Mikolaycak (Viking Press, 1982). I read both books to the class and then reread them so students can take a second look at the pictures. Encourage students to talk about the characters, the scenery, the details, the action, and the colors. They might ask each other questions such as: What are the people's expressions like in this picture? How do they look different from the people in the other book? Does the background look the same? What colors are used the most in each book? Why?

On the chalkboard we compile a list of similarities and differences that the students find in the two books, like these comments:

Peter and the Wolf, illustrated by Erna Voigt

shows instruments on each page; other book doesn't

pictures seem more like a story, done in cartoon style

Peter and the Wolf, illustrated by Charles Mikolaycak

boy is lying on a stone wall; in other book he's standing behind a wooden fence

grandfather looks meaner; boy looks braver, clothes are poorer

In addition to comments about the illustrations, students will probably identify similarities and differences in the language used in the stories. Later, you can focus on other paired tales in which the language is of more interest than the visuals, or follow up the group activity with individual conferences in which the student dictates comments to you. Following the initial group presentation, make the books available on the classroom writing table so children can study them at their leisure. Children can choose one of the two to discuss with each other or with you.

After seeing two versions of the Hans Christian Andersen tale *The Nightingale*, one illustrated by Nancy Burkert (Harper and Row, 1965) and the other illustrated by Fluvio Testa (Crowell, 1974), children dictated the following:

Burkert version: I like the detail and the light colors. The pictures look real. The setting goes back and makes it look better. The people look Chinese. The real bird looks better than the artificial bird. The artificial bird is made of rubies and diamonds.

Testa version: I don't like the pictures because they look more like cartoon pictures than the book. I don't like the pictures because they don't look very real. I do like the pictures of the fake bird because it looks like a chicken.

Using individual dictation with younger children gives them the freedom of fluency. You can encourage older children to write their own responses. Whether writing or dictating, students learn to use words to describe what they see and to make comparisons.

John Warren Stewig, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

People Sentences

In this activity, students discuss ways sentences are put together and develop a sense of sentence structure. You'll need ten 6″ × 18″ cards cut out of posterboard, each bearing one of the following words: *a, the, and, funny, brown, clown, dog, ran, chased,* and *away*; and several blank cards.

Select ten volunteers from the class to be words in a "people sentence" and give each student a card. Ask these students to arrange themselves into a sentence and then to face the class holding their cards. Then, following directions from you or the class, the "people sentence" rearranges its word order in various ways, and the class discusses each new sentence variation. You will need to tailor your discussion to suit the actual sentences that are created, but the following discussion will serve as an example.

Suppose that your students form the sentence "a brown dog chased the funny clown and ran away." Point out to the students that their feeling for sentence structure is good.

Next, ask the students holding the words *dog* and *clown* to exchange places. Now the sentence reads, "a brown clown chased the funny dog and ran away." Ask students if this is a sentence. Most will say yes. Then tell the students holding the words *brown* and *clown* to change places. The result: "a clown brown chased the funny dog and ran away." Ask students if this is a sentence. This time you'll probably get a mix of yesses and noes. Pose questions to help students to think about their answers: What is it that bothers the students who said no? Does it sound more natural to say "brown clown"? Explain that sometimes changing the order of just a few words in a sentence can change the feeling of the sentence and even its meaning.

Students in the audience may want to be in charge of designing sentences themselves. After the "people sentence" changes its word order, ask members of the class what they think of the result. Ask them if the sentence makes sense.

Finally, ask them what they would have to do to make the sentence into a question. Ask if there is more than one way to do this. Interested students can use the blank cards to write extra words needed to form a question, and then can arrange all the cards into a question.

In using this exercise, students may well surprise you, and themselves, in demonstrating what they can do to make words work together.

Johanna Clinton, Urbana, Illinois

Lunch-Bag Reading

Talking and writing about what it means to be an expert will build students' confidence while giving them practice in editing and revising their own writing. Ask students to name the areas in which they are experts. Accept the expected answers—soccer, piano, math, chili making—and then tell students that you suspect they are experts in some other areas that they might not have thought of. Ask them such questions as the following:

> Are any of you experts at wearing out socks? How do you accomplish this?
>
> Who is an expert at persuasion? Whom do you usually try to persuade and how do you do it?
>
> Are any of you experts at walking a dog or playing with a cat? What special skills are required to walk a dog? to play with a cat?

Question students until they begin to come up with their own imaginative ideas of areas in which they may be experts. Next, ask each student to write a paragraph or two about the area in which he or she is an expert. I give students the following instructions: "First, choose something at which you are an expert. Describe your 'expert technique' in detail so that the reader could use this technique if he or she wanted to become an expert in this area. Then explain why you think it's important to be an expert in this area."

After students have written drafts, provide time for meeting in small groups and sharing writings. In discussing each other's drafts, students should try to answer such questions as "Did the writer use enough detail in describing his or her technique?" "Does this explanation make you feel that it's important to be an expert in this area?" Before students write their final drafts, they can help each other check spelling and punctuation.

Here's an excerpt from a rough draft written by a fifth-grade student:

> I'm an expert at getting sick. All you have to do is dress very warmly and get in your bed. Stay there for about five minutes, then get out and make your bed. Hold your breath for an extra red face, then get to your mom as fast as you can. Avoid her using the thermometer as much as possible. After you have convinced her that you are really feeling sick, get back in bed or on the couch. Be very casual about turning on T.V. Squint your eyes, moan, and whine. Refuse to eat breakfast. You can eat later.

Ask students to copy their final drafts onto sheets of paper cut to fit the outside of a paper lunch bag, and to glue or staple each written

description to one bag. These customized lunch bags can be filled with objects related to the paragraphs (such as a dog leash and a rubber ball or a thermometer and a tissue) for use in class discussion, can provide double service as lunch bags and conversation pieces in the cafeteria, or can be displayed along the hallway leading to the cafeteria or on the cafeteria walls for other students to read.

Flora Wyatt, Lawrence, Kansas

Take A Message, Please

I use this activity to help my students learn to communicate concisely and to listen carefully for information. I bring to class a simple-to-operate telephone answering machine—a cassette tape recorder can also be used—and set it up on a table at one side of the classroom. After I show students how to operate it, we talk about why people find answering machines useful. I ask students to think of messages that various people might record on answering machines in their offices or homes. Then I ask students to think of a message that we might use on an answering machine if our class had its own telephone line and telephone, such as this one: "Hi, we can't come to the telephone now because we're at our desks doing our classwork. But if you leave a message, we'll make sure that it gets to the right person. Okay?"

To provide practice in listening to messages and taking notes, I establish the following routine. I label the table with the answering machine "The Message Station." Each Monday, I place a new incoming message on the answering machine. Taking turns at the message station, students listen to the message, write the important information from the message onto telephone message pads, and deposit the written message in a message box on my desk. I use "While You Were Out" pads similar to those found in many offices, but almost any message format that provides enough space for writing would be appropriate.

Messages I have used include a reminder from the school librarian about new books in our library, the Friday menu for the school cafeteria, and the following announcement of an upcoming field trip: "Sorry you can't talk now, but I wouldn't want to disturb your work, so I will leave a message. I'm Jerry Everett, the Field Services Coordinator for your school system. I just wanted to let you know that your class field trip to the city Zoological Park next Tuesday is all set. I'll meet you at the park entrance at 9:30 a.m. and will look forward to showing you our snake exhibit, aquarium, aviary, and the swinging bridge. If there's time, we may even have a chance to ride the pedal boats.

Remember to bring your signed permission slips to your teacher by this Friday. Good-by until then!"

To integrate this activity into content areas, I have also used messages that coincide with the topic under study. I found colleagues, school administrators, parents, and members of the community glad to help by recording messages for my students. For example, when we began a unit on personal health and hygiene, I asked a local family practitioner to record good health tips. Another possibility is asking a speaker who is scheduled to address the class to record a "preview" message to heighten anticipation or to record the instructions for a simple assignment that would prepare students for the speaker's presentation.

Patricia J. Anderson, Greenville, North Carolina, with Lester L. Laminack, Cullowhee, North Carolina

Who Says?

Looking at point of view in childrens' books gives students the opportunity to use not only language skills but also critical thinking skills. Telling a story from a point of view different from that of the author is an interesting activity; using a wordless picture book to study point of view can require even more thought and imagination.

When selecting the book, match its complexity to the levels and experiences of your students. You might select a book such as *Hiccup* by Mercer Mayer (Dial, 1976) because it has only two characters and the story line is simple and direct. Two hippopotamuses go out on a picnic and ride in a rowboat. The male, elegant in his straw hat, tries to help the female get over the hiccups, and succeeds only when he pushes her out of the boat. Success makes him smug; she is disdainful. Then he gets the hiccups, and she gets her chance for revenge. There are only two points of view to compare, and all of the interaction is between these two characters.

A more complex story would be Mercer Mayer's *Frog Goes to Dinner* (Dial, 1974). It is the story of a frog who hides in a boy's pocket when the boy and his family go out to dinner. Once inside the restaurant, the frog creates all sorts of havoc, resulting in the family's being thrown out of the restaurant. The boy and frog both appear dejected, at least until they are in the bedroom with the door closed. Then both burst into laughter.

Sixteen characters are in this book (not counting nonparticipants such as restaurant patrons who only watch the action), and thus there are at least sixteen possible points of view for students to examine and

develop. In addition, some of the characters witness only certain incidents, which means students could compare viewpoints or produce a joint retelling of the story by different characters.

Once a picture book is chosen, share it first with no purpose in mind but students' enjoyment and understanding. You might decide to share it in small groups, to let students take turns looking at the book, to obtain several copies of the book to pass around, or even to show a filmstrip or motion picture version of the book.

Then ask students to select one of the characters in the book and to imagine that they are that character as they look at the book for a second time. Next, students write what happened from the point of view of that character, including not only descriptions of the action but also what they think the character thought and felt about the events.

When students have finished writing and revising, several volunteers can read their writings aloud. Ask the listeners to talk about how the versions differed and why. This discussion can be followed by an exploration of why people sometimes preceive the same things differently, of the effect of an author's choice of point of view, and of the role and importance of various characters within a story.

Joan I. Glazer, Providence, Rhode Island

Shared Bulletin Boards, Shared Learning

Every year teachers struggle to find "new and exciting" ideas to display on their bulletin boards. Fancy trim, calico letters, and cute characters all add to the visual appeal. But once the bulletin board is up, do the students *really* notice it? Does the bulletin board contribute to the learning in the classroom? I saw my first "shared bulletin board" set up at our public library as an opinion poll titled "What's the Worst . . . ?" Children had written, in graffiti style, their own answers underneath different questions.

"What's the worst food you've ever eaten?" was answered with "broculi," "spinage," "livr." In spite of the functional spelling, the students were reading and laughing as they shared responses.

"What's the worst place you've ever been?" was answered with the predictable "school" and "liberary" as well as "Kansas City" and "doctr."

"What's the worst present you've ever gotten?"—a timely question after Christmas vacation—had been answered with "Nixon" followed

by "Carter." The students argued briefly over who was the worst president. Then, with a sudden discovery, one student said, "Hey, that's supposed to be *present*, not *president*!" In the discussion that followed (as I remained silent) one student maintained that a president *could* be a gift because we don't always get what we ask for, while another student explained the miscue with, "They read a different question."

Their discussion was teaching me more about language and how children learn than I had probably taught them about language all year—a humbling thought. Children learn from each other and through experience, even without instruction.

In realizing the value of such child-directed discussion, I began to look for more ways to encourage it in the classroom. Opinion polls and voting (based on the bulletin board) became a regular part of our opening circle-time each day with the teacher and the students asking questions.

One of my bulletin board questions had far-reaching effects. "What's the worst book you've ever read?" brought lively discussion and a positive initiative. Five students formed a book club to read and discuss books of their own choosing. This first book club spurred others. The members met at first three days a week, then five, to talk about their reading.

At first I participated in the book club meetings, trying to be sure my own comprehension questions were covered. I soon realized that the students were covering the necessary questions. They freely talked with one another offering opinions, predictions, recall of facts, inferences—all without my direct intervention. The book club members also made good use of their time during class visits to the library—hunting for books and then sitting at a table reading, discussing, or voting on the next selection. It wasn't long before book clubs replaced the more traditional reading groups. I was relinquishing total control of learning in the classroom and was sharing it with my students.

These book clubs eventually claimed the bulletin board as well. As an example, after reading White Stag by Kate Seredy (Penguin, 1979), one group used the bulletin board for a mural/time-line (scenes and captions) of the significant events in the story. Tasks for the mural were assigned by the group according to each child's strengths. Some concentrated on art work, others wrote captions, and still others served as "consultants" by referring back to the text.

Bulletin boards were no longer "my" territory. They now were "our" display area for shared learning experiences.

Kathryn J. Mitchell, Stephens College, Columbia, Missouri

Inanimate Writing

Students who lack writing motivation may benefit from a lesson in "inanimate writing." Begin by asking students to suggest examples of inanimate objects, such as pencils, pencil sharpeners, rubber bands, garbage cans, motorcycles, baseball bats, etc.

Tell students that for a short time they are no longer human beings—they have become inanimate objects. First everyone in the class can pretend to be the same object—the floor, for instance. Give an example of what the floor might say about how it feels to be a floor: "I really enjoy being a floor. I love it when the janitor comes in and mops me. It feels just like a backrub."

Walk around the room and encourage each student to say something about how it feels to be a floor. You might hear such comments as: "I can shine and see people looking at me." "I can hear everything that is going on." "I have friends like the wall and the window that never leave me."

Next, ask students to think of things they *wouldn't* like about being a floor. Again, provide an example for students to imitate: "I just hate it when those kids drop pencils on me, especially when they land point down! And it sure makes me mad when those shoes worn by humans are all muddy. They feel squishy and gritty on my nice clean back. Don't they have any compassion for us floors?"

Finally, ask students to think of a different inanimate object and to write a paragraph, a story, or a letter from this object's point of view. I don't require any particular format or set any length for this writing assignment. I just suggest that students pick an object that gets a lot of use by humans, and I remind them that descriptions of their feelings are essential to making their writing come alive.

Virgilee Reed, Stillwater, Oklahoma

Practice with Paragraphs

When my fourth and fifth graders write papers, they often have difficulty organizing their facts into cohesive paragraphs. I help them out by distributing large (5″ × 8″ or 6″ × 9″) index cards and introducing them to the writing format described below. The activity described below helps students to sort facts into logical groups, serves as a springboard to phrasing good lead sentences, and is useful preparation for writing a paper.

First, I ask students to read from all available sources on a topic of their choosing (animals and occupations are popular and easy topics), as if preparing for a presentation before a panel of questioners. My students are generally horrified at the idea of facing such a panel and are relieved to hear that the whole presentation will take place in the privacy of their own imaginations.

After students have read extensively on their topic, they must invent the sorts of questions that members of a panel would ask. Each question is copied onto an index card; underneath the question, the student writes his or her "expert" response, based on recent reading. Each question-and-answer card, then, represents one paragraph of information. To help students with the question-and-answer process, we role-play how the speaker expands upon questions to incorporate more information into the answers. For instance, one student in my class read from one of her cards a question and answer about the largest types of bears, and another student asked, "Well, how large are they?" We realized that a bear expert might have thought to include that information in the first answer, without requiring an additional question. Incidentally, for students who are concerned too soon about neatness, the use of cards seems to promote healthy messiness. And the size of the cards allows students to add and rearrange details throughout the process.

Remind students to watch for irrelevant information on each card. A fact that is inappropriate in answer to one question may be a good answer to a different question and can be transferred to another card (or a new question card may be created for it). When students share and compare cards, they frequently find the first line of the answer to be the main point of response to the question, and the rest of the information to be supplementary. Thus, the question and the first line of the response can often be restructured to create a lead sentence. For example, one student wrote a question and a first line as follows: "What do monkeys do with their long tails? They use their tails for an extra hand." Other students pointed out that these two lines could be combined into the following paragraph opener: "The monkey's long tail is like an extra hand." But remind students to look for the sentence that gives the main point and not to assume that every first line can be developed into a lead sentence. Once each card is revised to begin with a lead sentence, the students number their paragraph cards in the desired order for their papers. Then, students are ready for the next steps: revising, polishing, and writing introductions and conclusions.

Mary M. Kitagawa, Richey Elementary School, Tucson, Arizona

Already-Know Time

When students are told, "Write for ten minutes whatever you *already know* or think about solar energy," there are bound to be complaints: "I don't know anything about it," or "How am I supposed to know?" Gary doesn't want to be wrong, and Molly believes it's the teacher's job to dispense all information. But having students write what I call "already-know statements" teaches them that they know more than they think they do and that they themselves are dispensers of information. Not only do students begin to feel some control over their learning, but they are using a strategy which will help them learn and remember more about what they read. No matter the subject, information and ideas become firmly cemented to what students already know.

Step one: *Write already-know statements.* Students have ten minutes to write what they know about the topic and what they think might be true. They are surprised that one thought triggers another.

Step two: *Make up questions.* The brainstorming students do while writing their already-know statements turns up questions about the topic. They reread their statements and write questions.

Step three: *Read and gather information.* Students find articles or books about their subject and note information which helps them answer their questions and decide if their statements are true. They are reading for a purpose.

Step four: *Write knowledge statements.* Students study their questions and answers. They put the resources and questions aside and ask themselves: What is interesting about my subject? What can I explain to another student? Answers to these questions become their "now-know" or knowledge statements.

Step five: *Share knowledge statements.* Students form small groups and share their knowledge statements. The writer reads each statement aloud so that listeners respond to the meaning rather than to the neatness or mechanical accuracy. The listeners ask questions to help them understand what they heard. They comment on the statements, often adding other examples to support the writer's thoughts.

By writing, questioning, reading, and sharing, students not only learn more from the references they use, but they also learn from themselves and from each other.

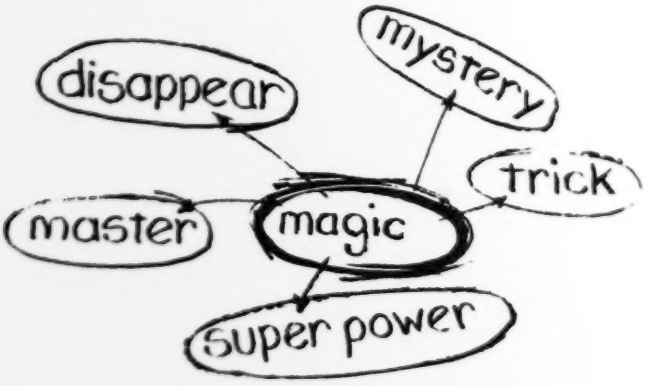
Dianne Walsh Hampton, Guilderland, New York, Central Schools.

Word Webs

Reading begins before the book is opened. One way to help students better comprehend factual material is to help them get in touch with what they already know about a topic *before* they start reading. Word webbing gives students a chance to talk in a low pressure situation (with no right or wrong answers), to do some logical thinking, and to become aware of their own background knowledge.

Word webbing begins by taking one core word and putting it on the board or overhead projector. From that word, students begin associating other words that could be connected. Students explain their choices and tell how their words are connected to the core word.

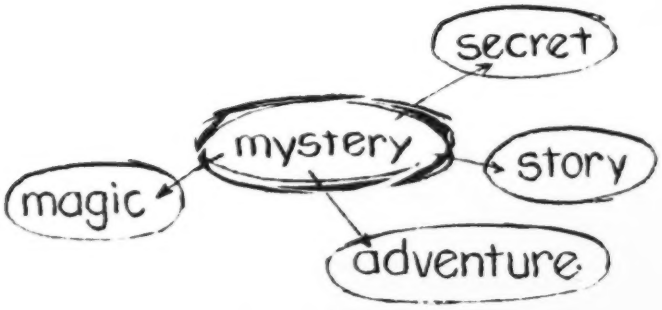
For example, in preparation for reading a biographical sketch of a magician, one class started with the core word *magic*. In response, the students offered such words as *disappear, mystery, trick, superpower,* and *master.*



When the students had listed as many related words as they could, they then read the biographical sketch. Afterwards, they checked to see how many of their words and ideas appeared in the sketch. Students are always pleased to see their ideas actually used in print!

We extended this word webbing by making one of the arms the new core word. This started a whole new web (see next page).

Another example of word webbing prepared students to read a nonfiction article about cowboys. Our core word was *cowboy.* The first



words were *holster, saddle, boots, bandanna.* As we began to spin off, we had *gunbelt* to go with *holster.* The spin-off word *chuckwagon* started a new, extended branch as students began to modernize the cowboy with words like *truck* and *airplane.* This led to a lively discussion about the differences between the cowboy of one hundred years ago and the cowboy of today.

When we stopped adding to our word web, we had over ninety words on the board, and the students could have gone on and on. They were using good oral language skills as they verbalized their ideas, they were learning from one another about word association, and they were having fun. When students actually began reading the article, they did so with far more enthusiasm than usual.

Mary Oakvik, Edison Middle School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Fruit Talk

Use this entertaining strategy to involve students in comparing similar objects and learning to *describe* without *telling.* Hold up a paper bag containing a piece of fruit. (The contents of the bag should be known only to you.) Tell the students that the bag contains a piece of fruit and that they are to guess the type by the clues you give. Provide clues about the fruit's color, shape, texture, and size by comparing each characteristic to a visible object in the classroom. For example, "This fruit is red like Amy's sweater," or "It feels smooth like the top of your desk." Continue drawing comparisons until the students guess what's inside the bag.

Next, ask for a student volunteer to conduct another round of guessing. The student selects a different bag, peeks inside, and then describes the mystery fruit in the same manner that you did, calling

on his or her classmates when they raise their hands to guess the type of fruit. Continue to ask for volunteers until the contents of all the paper bags have been identified, and then move on to the next step.

Hold up a piece of fruit (either one already described or a different one), ask your students to identify it, and write its name on the chalkboard. Also, write the following category headings on the board: Color, Shape, Texture, and Taste. Provide each student with either the whole fruit (a grape, for instance) or a section of an orange or slice of an apple, cautioning them not to eat the sample. Elicit descriptions of the fruit for each of the four categories. Start by asking students to name the color of the fruit and to suggest other things that are the same color. At this stage, encourage them to consider objects outside the classroom. For example, students might compare the red color of an apple to a fire truck, a red rose, a stop sign, blood, etc. Follow the same procedure for shape, texture, and taste, recording all of the responses in their respective categories. These comparisons can then be used as students jointly compose a short description of the fruit. Let students include one comparison from each category. When finished, you might end up with something like this:

> An apple is red like a fire truck.
> It feels smooth like glass.
> It is round like a baseball.
> It tastes sweet like cotton candy.

Ellen M. Manning, Allegan, Michigan

Reading and Writing Directions

Students might be surprised to know that they aren't the only ones who have to "read the directions." In fact, hardly anyone gets through a day without following some sort of written instructions—whether on a tax form, a bus schedule, a cake mix, or a vending machine. Writing instructions requires using language clearly and precisely and makes a good basis for an activity focusing on language and problem solving. "Reading and Writing Directions" takes two class periods. In the first, students analyze a specific task, determine the steps necessary to accomplish it, as well as the correct sequence, and phrase the instructions in their own words. Then, during the second class period, you or a student volunteer "tests" the clarity of the directions by reading and following them in front of the class. This way you give the authors a chance to observe, discuss, and revise their directions in order to make the instructions more accurate.

In preparation, assemble the following items in a grocery bag:

peanut butter
paper plate
jelly
two slices of bread
plastic knife
plastic spoon
napkin

Tape the bag shut and label one side "Ingredients for Making a Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwich."

On Day One, bring the grocery bag to class and walk around the room holding it up so that students can read the label. Explain that all the ingredients necessary for the preparation of the sandwich are in the bag—except for the directions, which they are to provide. First, let students speculate a bit on what might be in the bag, based on its size and shape, and then remove the items one by one and place them on a table where all can see. Next, divide the class into groups of three or four students and ask them to use their problem-solving talents to plan their directions. They need to think of the task as a series of steps and to determine what is necessary to accomplish *each individual step.* (Tell students that when you or a student volunteer follows their directions in front of the class, you will not do anything that is not specified in the directions. So even though the task is a familiar one, students will need to think carefully to avoid leaving out any steps.) After discussing the individual steps involved in making a sandwich, the group members decide how they want to phrase each step to make it as clear as possible, and one member of the group writes down and numbers the steps. Make sure students know that their instructions must make use of all the items from the bag. (If possible, give each group a transparency on which to copy their final set of instructions. This will save you the trouble of copying each group's instructions onto the board.)

On Day Two, after all the groups have planned and written their directions, project the first group's transparency or write the directions on the board, and read the directions aloud or have a volunteer read them aloud. You or a volunteer from another group then uses the items in the bag to follow the instructions to the letter, sometimes with hilarious results. (Have a loaf of bread on hand; at least two slices per group will be needed.) I pass each completed sandwich to the group that authored the directions and allow them to divide and enjoy it as they revise their directions.

As each set of directions was "tested" in my classroom, I asked students to make comments and suggestions as to how the directions could be improved. Are there any steps that are unclear? Are the steps in the right order? Is any step left out? The most often rewritten step was "Put the peanut butter on the bread." Why? Because students often forgot to mention that the jar must first be opened!

Cathy Dugdale, Racine, Wisconsin

Writing Haiku

Yellow daffodil
Gently swaying in spring breeze.
Happy is my heart.

With a little care, you can adapt the study of haiku to almost any grade level and still do justice to traditional elements of the art form. The poem above was written by a primary student during our study of haiku. As an extension of a unit on Japan, my students and I learned about the haiku form for one-half hour a day for a week.

On the first morning, I showed students a sound filmstrip titled *Haiku* (from Pied Piper Production's Literature for Children series). On the chalkboard I listed some traditional characteristics of haiku:

contains very few words

is written in a special pattern composed of a first line of five syllables, a second line of seven syllables, and a third line of five syllables

has nature and the seasons as subject matter

captures the mood of a brief moment

evokes an emotional response in the reader

Then I read aloud selected haiku from the anthologies listed below. Though I read a greater number of traditional Japanese haiku, I also read several free-form, contemporary haiku by Japanese and American poets.

Haiku Vision in Poetry and Photography by Ann Atwood (Scribner, 1977).
Suggested grade level: 4–up.

Cricket Songs: Japanese Haiku, compiled and translated by Harry Behn (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964).
Suggested grade level: 4–7.

Wind, Sand, and Sky by Rebecca Caudill; illustrated by Donald Carrick (Dutton, 1976).
Suggested grade level: 1–6.

Birds, Frogs, and Moonlight, translated by Sylvia Cassedy and Kunihiro Suetake; illustrated by Vo-Dinh (Doubleday, 1967).
Suggested grade level: 2–5.

Don't Tell the Scarecrow and Other Japanese Poems by Issa, Yayu, Kikaku, and other Japanese Poets; illustrated by Talivaldis Stubis (Four Winds Press, 1969).
Suggested grade level: K–4.

A Few Flies and I: Haiku by Issa, selected by Jean Merrill and Ronni Solbert from translations by R. H. Blyth and Nobuyuki Yuasa; illustrated by Ronni Solbert (Pantheon, 1969).
Suggested grade level: 3–7.

Hello, Small Sparrow by Hannah Lyons Johnson; illustrated by Tony Chen (Lothrop, Lee and Shepard, 1971).
Suggested grade level: 3–6.

In a Spring Garden, edited by Richard Lewis; illustrated by Ezra Jack Keats (Dial Press, 1965).
Suggested grade level: K–7.

Flower Moon Snow by Kazue Mizumura (Crowell, 1977).
Suggested grade level: K–4.

I See the Winds by Kazue Mizumura (Crowell, 1966).
Suggested grade level: 2–5.

I showed students how to clap their hands in time to the reading of a poem in order to help them count syllables, but I stressed that following the pattern shouldn't be the most important consideration in writing their own haiku. Choosing words that sounded good together and that helped create the desired mood would be just as important.

The next morning, we looked at pictures of Japanese life that I had assembled, including study prints and pictures from magazines. I asked students, "What have you learned about Japan so far?" After hearing some of their ideas, I asked, "Do any of the things you've learned give you ideas for your own haiku poems?" Students' suggestions were listed on the chalkboard to help them decide on topics.

The third morning was warm, so we went outside and walked in the park next to the school. Students brought clipboards, pads of paper, and pencils so that they could write and edit their own haiku. We

looked at the flowering trees and talked about the seasons and how we felt about them. When the students seemed ready, I asked them to put down some of their thoughts in haiku form.

On the last two days of the week, we spent our time reading aloud and discussing our poems. After a student read his or her poem, we would share our ideas about it. I posed these questions to the class:

> What emotions do you feel after hearing this poem?
>
> Which words in the poem do the most to create the mood?
>
> Are there any words that don't fit in with the mood of the poem?
>
> Which words do you think could be replaced with stronger ones?
>
> What specific changes would you suggest to the poem's author? (At times students' suggestions led to a word change, but each poet had the final say and sometimes decided that he or she had already chosen the best word to fit the poem.)
>
> Which traditional characteristics of a haiku does this poem have?
>
> How closely does this poem fit the traditional pattern of lines and syllables? (With younger students you may want to relax the emphasis on form and omit this question and the previous one.)

Sometimes we spend part of our discussion time helping students find words that fit the pattern better. For example, Scott was trying to create an image of Pegasus, but his second line, "Born with wings to fly, flying" did not sound right to him. With the group's help, Scott came up with the following version:

> White winged Pegasus
> Born with wings to fly, soaring
> Reaching for the stars.

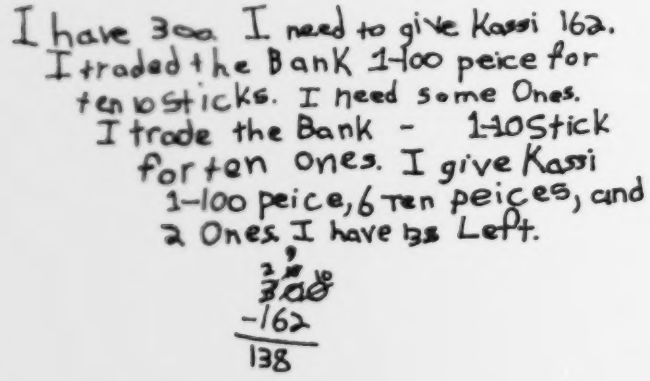
When students had final versions ready, they dictated their poems to me, and I entered the poems on our word processor. I printed out their poems, gave each student a printed copy to take home, and kept one copy in the classroom. To create a class haiku book, the mother of one of the students copied each poem in calligraphy on a sheet of paper. The students were so pleased with their poems that they wanted to paint watercolors as accompaniments. We glued one watercolor onto each page of poetry, made a title page and a dedication page, and used grasscloth wallpaper for the cover. A black silklike cord was used as a binding. But before we bound the book, I made enough photocopies so that each student could have his or her own haiku book.

Adapted from an idea by Marlene Lazzara, Henking School, Glenview, Illinois

Writing to Learn Subtraction

For my students, using language has played an important part in learning new math concepts. I supply pocket-sized spiral notebooks and pencils and help students talk and write their way through math problems until the steps and symbols become clear. For example, Monica was having difficulty learning three-digit subtraction involving two zeros and regrouping. We began to work some simple subtraction problems, using Monica's strength in language and the concrete support of base-ten blocks, which vary in size to represent different numerical amounts.

In one problem Monica had been given three blocks worth 100 each and needed to give 162 of these 300 to another student. On one page of her notebook Monica wrote the first bit of information she had for this problem: "I have 300. I need to give Kassi 162." As I talked Monica through the problem, she recorded what she did. Monica checked her work by counting the blocks and completing the subtractions.


I have 300. I need to give Kassi 162.
I traded the Bank 1-100 peice for
ten 10 sticks. I need some Ones.
I trade the Bank - 1-10Stick
for ten ones. I give Kassi
1-100 peice, 6 ten peices, and
2 Ones. I have 138 Left.
-162
138

The second problem was easier for Monica. She found creative ways of abbreviating some of her terms and recorded in words only the essential steps of her process. We again discussed each step and made the necessary changes in the algorithm. As the mathematical symbols took on more meaning for her, Monica moved away from using written and oral language to record her steps. Feeling more comfortable with

the process. Monica asked if she could do a third problem without writing out the steps.

Kathryn Mitchell Pierce, Columbia, Missouri

Writing as Scientists

While planning a science unit that included several simple experiments, I looked for a way in which to integrate reading and writing into the unit. When one of my kindergartners, excited about the experiments we were going to perform, asked me if he could write about them in his journal, it occurred to me that this would be a good opportunity for students to use writing to record predictions and observations.

The three experiments involved were placing a stalk of celery in a glass full of colored water, growing crystals from salt or sugar, and sprouting seeds in a clear jar. Before we began the first experiment, I explained to my students that science experiments are often performed in a *laboratory*, called a *lab* for short, where special equipment is available to the scientists. I told students that like scientists working in a lab, we would be writing "lab reports" about our experiments.

I pointed out that a scientist doesn't always find the information that he or she is looking for; sometimes an experiment turns out very differently than he or she expected. The lab report contains details about the experiment that can help the scientist understand the results of the experiment, and it can be an important reference if the experiment is repeated. As a group, we brainstormed a list of information that should be included in each lab report. This list included the materials needed to complete the experiment, the steps involved, and observations on the results of the experiment. Then we performed the first experiment, and I distributed paper and pencils for students to use in writing their first lab reports.

The second and third experiments that we performed each had a "wait-time" (the time between the onset of the experiment and when results could be observed). During this time I asked students to write predictions of what they thought would happen. Students finished writing their lab reports when the experiment was completed. By the time we had performed the third experiment, students were at home in their roles as amateur scientists and were able to record the steps, make predictions, and take notes on the results without consulting me.

Judi La Due, Iliff Preschool Kindergarten, Denver, Colorado

An Inquiring Approach

My middle-grade science students treat research as just another assignment until I introduce them to the inquiry approach. Students' ho-hum attitudes change to enthusiasm and interest as we pursue research topics.

The inquiry method fits nicely with our study of bones and muscles. I first brainstorm with the class, reviewing what they know about these topics. Then I ask each student to think of inquiries—questions related to bones or muscles that he or she would like to have answered. Students write their questions on sheets of paper and turn them in to me.

I group the questions in general categories. For instance, questions about bones and muscles might be placed in the following categories:

1. bone formation and growth
2. the movement of bones, muscles, and joints
3. the relationship of diet and exercise to healthy bones and muscles, including the issues of weight training and adding calcium to the diet
4. the repair of injuries, such as broken bones or strained muscles, and the long-term effects of these injuries
5. the causes and effects of diseases affecting bones and muscles, such as arthritis and multiple sclerosis, and how certain diseases can be avoided

These categories provide the means to organize study groups. Each general topic is researched by those students who asked questions relating to that topic. Some rearranging or further division of groups may be necessary to ensure that each topic has enough students to complete the research.

I distribute copies of the original questions. The members of each group decide who will research which questions and how they will present their findings to the class. Each day during our unit, students have part of the class period for research, using references that I provide in the classroom, and for planning their presentations.

My students choose a variety of formats for their presentations. One group combined pictures, data charts and headlines from calcium advertisements and constructed a poster that each student referred to in presenting facts about the topic. Another group borrowed the movable model of joints and bones from a doctor's office and demonstrated

with the model as they explained what they learned through their research.

This unit might progress faster if I began with a lecture, but when I involve students in questioning and research, the quality of work improves and students seem to remember more of the material because they are actively involved in learning.

Kathy Brunstad, Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

Whose Shoes?

Assemble ten or twelve shoes of different kinds and sizes; for instance, a ballet slipper, a snow boot, a baby bootie, a sandal, etc. Display all the shoes at the front of the room, propped on the chalkboard or against the wall. Number the shoes from one to ten or twelve and tape a number on each shoe. Then ask students to number a sheet of paper leaving three lines blank for each number.

Explain that for each shoe, students are to use the first of the three lines on their page to identify whether the shoe in question would be worn by a man, a woman, a girl, a boy, or both sexes. The second line is for describing what the wearer might do when wearing the shoe, such as "The wearer would do something fancy, maybe go to a party." The third line is for identifying the season or kind of weather in which the shoe would be worn. When students are finished writing, discuss the conclusions that they drew for each shoe and why they made the comments that they did. To give students a chance to use their imaginations further and draw sharper conclusions, ask each student to choose a shoe from the collection and to write a paragraph describing the kind of person who would wear it.

Robert Perrin, Terre Haute, Indiana

"About Me" Collages

Making "About Me" collages is a great way for students of any age to warm up to each other at the start of the school year. The finished collages can be used as jumping-off points for writing an "About Me" paragraph; they also provide several months' worth of discussion-provoking bulletin boards. Students need only old magazines, scissors, paper, and glue to create collages that show their interests—places they like to go, things they like to do, favorite foods, favorite animals, hobbies, sports, etc. Students then find common interests by questioning

other members of the class: "Who else used a picture of a lake?" "Does anyone have a photo of a baseball or basketball?" "How many of you chose pictures of dogs?"

Space will determine how many collages you can display at once. Pick a first batch by drawing names, and save the rest for another day.

Carol A. Pierre, Lufkin Junior High East, Lufkin, Texas

Book Exchange

Three classes in our school—one second grade, one third grade, and one fourth grade—have been exchanging stories written and "published" (neatly copied over and made into book form, complete with cover, title page, and illustrations) by students.

On a given day, two children from each class take the books they have written to another classroom and read the books aloud from an "author's chair" at the front of the room. The students in the audience are free to ask the authors questions and talk about what they like best about each story. In one reading session, an author may be asked to give directions on creating a folding book, explain the steps he or she took to complete the book, or elaborate on ideas for another book.

Another type of exchange takes place when we gather books written by students in one class and take them to another classroom to be "checked out" and read. These books are popular with student readers. Slips of paper clipped to the backs of books by the student authors provide space for the readers to record comments. Both of these types of exchanges have proven to be great motivators for reading and writing.

Joyce Ahuna-Ka'ai'ai, Kamehameha Elementary School, Honolulu, Hawaii

Advanced Intermediate—Extending Language Learning

Living Biographies

To present a living biography, each student selects a biography and becomes that person for the duration of a short visit to the class. Since I started using this project, my class has been visited by an interesting and varied assortment of characters, including Michelangelo, Beethoven, Daniel Boone, Albert Einstein, George and Martha Washington, Al Capone, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Tracy Austin, Chuck Yeager, and Walt Disney.

My students made their selections after the librarian presented a lesson on biographies and autobiographies to the class. Many students chose books about personal heroes, either historical or contemporary, while others needed help to focus on a particular interest, such as baseball or horses, and then to find a book written about a person outstanding in that field.

After some discussion, my fourth graders decided that a three-week time frame would be about right, allowing two weeks to choose and read a biography and a week to prepare to visit the class as the chosen person—including time spent in choosing details, practicing the "delivery," and selecting appropriate clothes to wear in order to look as much as possible like the chosen person. (If you can, supplement the clothes students bring from home with inexpensive secondhand accessories—ties, sunglasses, hats, belts, shoes, etc. These can be kept in the classroom and used to dress up other activities as well.) To add extra interest to their visits, students may also bring in props-photographs, newspapers, sports equipment, etc.—that relate to the person's life or occupation.

Suggest to students that they insert slips of paper in the book to mark the mention of main events in the person's life and to mark interesting details and stories that they might want to relate to the class. After finishing their books, students can refer back to the markers and take notes on those passages that they want to use as a basis for their presentation. I tell students that the more familiar they become with their characters' lives, the more the class will learn from the visits and the more relaxed they will feel in front of the class. Students may take as many notes as they like while reading, but they should limit

the notes carried during the presentation to a few key words jotted on a notecard.

On the day scheduled for their visits—and you may need two or three days to hear from all the visitors—the students introduce themselves, explain some of the noteworthy things they have accomplished, and tell a few stories about people and places that were important in their lives. You can leave it up to each student as to whether he or she wants to accept questions from the class during or following the presentation. But what student wouldn't relish being Babe Ruth or Marie Curie for a few more minutes?

Celine Kaluza, Walden School, Deerfield, Illinois

A Dozen Reading Boosters

Looking for ways to encourage students to read? Here are a dozen practical ideas that can be easily implemented in the classroom or reading laboratory.

1. Set up a reading corner under a colorful banner with a slogan such as "Interesting Books to Browse Through." Include both fiction and nonfiction, and change the book titles weekly.
2. Prepare and distribute a "Reading Inventory" form. After students record their general likes and dislikes in reading material and list particular books and magazines they have enjoyed, compile a "Recommended by Your Classmates" reading list for distribution.
3. Focus on reading vocabulary and spelling with such word games as Spill and Spell, Probe, and Scrabble.
4. Set aside a few minutes of class time each day to read a poem, newspaper article, or magazine article to the class.
5. Display an assortment of local, regional, and national school newspapers on classroom windowsills, shelves, reading tables, and chalkboard trays. Encourage students to browse before and after class.
6. Provide tape recorders for use in the classroom. Rent or buy book tapes and let students read the book while listening to the tape.
7. Invite a bookstore representative to talk to the class about various aspects of running a bookstore. Possible questions to be addressed are:

What jobs are involved in running a bookstore?
How does the person who orders books decide which titles to order and how many copies?
How many books are sold per day?
What types of books sell best?
How are books categorized on the shelves?

8. Define the term *Best-Sellers List.* Cut out the current list from the newspaper and display it on a bulletin board. Ask students to follow the format and create their own "Best-Sellers Lists" for their age group.
9. Cut out the weekly book review section of the newspaper and start a collage-style poster. Title it "Book Reviews Worth Previewing." Every week, add the latest book reviews to the poster.
10. Ask students to see a movie or television program based on a book they have read. Have them work in pairs or in small groups to discuss the similarities and differences between the book and the movie. Let each group present its findings to the class.
11. Ask students to create "Book of the Week" posters promoting books they've read. Display the finished posters in the classroom.
12. Ask students to select articles of interest from magazines or newspapers at home. Students cut out the articles and bring them to class. Volunteers share their articles with the class, noting the title, author, and source, and providing a summary. The articles can then be displayed on a bulletin board.

Maria Valeri-Gold, Marietta, Georgia

Reading for Safety

Do students see road signs on their way to school? Do they read them? What kinds of messages do the signs give?

It's never too early for students to learn safe habits for walking, biking, and riding in cars; in our society, safety on the road necessitates being aware of the messages and warnings posted around us. In "Reading for Safety," students talk about the messages on the signs that they see every day. By examining and discussing the information offered, students realize the importance of reading the signs that they encounter.

After posing questions such as the ones suggested, ask students to record the messages from five or ten signs before the next class period.

They can either jot down the messages on their way to and from school or make a special trip around the neighborhood with a notebook in hand.

At the start of the next class period, ask students if they noticed any signs that they had never paid attention to before. If so, what were the signs? Were the messages important? Students can read aloud their lists, which will probably include messages such as *Stop, Don't Walk, Yield* and *Children Crossing,* and they can exchange ideas on why each message is posted, where it is usually posted, and what would happen if no one read the sign. Challenge students to explain the purpose of other less familiar sign messages such as *Soft Shoulder, Height: 13'5",* and *Maximum Weight: 3 Tons,* and to offer ideas on what would happen if these messages were ignored.

Next, ask the students to think about the way language is used in the messages they listed by asking the following questions:

> What do the messages have in common?
>
> Why are they all so brief?
>
> What would happen if each sign offered a paragraph of explanation?

You may want to ask students if they know what type of information is associated with each color used on signs along the highway. (Brown is for information about parks and points of interest; green is for information about exits, distances to other cities, and interchanges; and blue is for information about hospitals.)

Finally, give students a chance to create signs of their own. They can then post their signs in the classroom or at appropriate locations in the school. Students are free to think up original messages as long as they use the same simple, concise style that is found in the messages they have talked about in class. Students may want to write warnings such as "Watch out for spilled water," or they may prefer to provide information such as "School library is 2 doors down on your left."

After writing their messages on their signs and adding illustrations, students decide on appropriate locations for their signs. When all the signs are posted, students tour the classroom or school to read the advice that their classmates have given them.

Maria Valeri-Gold, Marietta, Georgia

Shoppers' Special

Newspaper ads are one of many kinds of environmental print, that world of words surrounding us daily. Local grocery ads are a natural

resource for bringing real-world occasions for reading and computing into the classroom.

Bring to the class three or four different double-page grocery ads from a recent local newspaper. Familiar items (bread, frozen orange juice, milk) will be offered by several stores, and you'll want to include ads with such duplicates. Post the ads on a bulletin board that is easily accessible.

On a set of numbered cards write problems—one to a card—that are based on prices in these ads. The problems will, of course, reflect the grade level of your students, and you can tailor the questions to include math skills you are currently emphasizing: decimal addition, percentages, division, two-step solutions. You may want to write problems similar to the following:

1. At what store would you shop to obtain the lowest total price for these six items: lettuce, oranges, canned ham, cottage cheese, saltines, celery?
2. Find the total cost for the following grocery list, assuming that you buy the items at Joe's Grocery: margarine, cottage cheese, eggs, milk, frozen corn, fresh spinach, lettuce, tomato paste, sugar, vinegar.
3. You need frozen orange juice, onions, vegetable oil, and chicken, and you are willing to drive from one store to another in order to buy each item at the lowest possible price. First, find out how much it would cost to buy all four items at one store. Then find out how much it would cost to buy each item at whatever store has the lowest price. In doing so, you drive eight miles at a cost to you of 11¢ a mile. How much will you save or lose by driving from store to store?

The grocery ad display can be used in a second small group activity. Divide the class into groups of four or five. Appoint a meal planner who assigns two items that appear in one or more of the ads to each member of the group. Taken together, these six or eight items must make a reasonable meal. Group members then go to the bulletin board to look for the lowest price available for each of their assigned items. When they return, they record those prices and find the cost of the meal. When everyone agrees on the answer, a new meal planner takes over and sends group members back to the ads to find the lowest prices for a new menu. After each member has had a turn to plan a meal, the group chooses its favorite menu.

Follow up with talk about the menus. Do favorite menus tend to be expensive menus? If so, why? Discuss the nutritional balance of

these meals using information students have learned in science or health and at home.

Sandra Pryor Clarkson, Math Learning Center, Hunter College, New York

Student Scientists

Do your students like to experiment, concoct, and discover? Don a lab coat and start them on their way to becoming student scientists. Students will practice observing and drawing conclusions and will develop confidence in speaking before an audience.

First, select a simple science experiment from one of the many books available in the children's department of the local library. Possibilities are:

> lifting a glass with air pressure
>
> separating salt from pepper without touching either
>
> copying a newspaper picture using turpentine
>
> (from *Experiments with Everyday Objects: Science Activities for Children, Parents and Teachers* by Kevin Goldstein-Jackson et al., Prentice Hall, 1978)
>
> bending, sealing, and blowing glass
>
> learning about soap and detergent
>
> (from *It's Fun to Know Why* by Julius Schwartz and Edwin Herron, McGraw-Hill, 1973)

In preparation, list the following words on the chalkboard or down the left side of a sheet of posterboard:

> Title of Experiment
> Materials
> Procedure
> Results

Write the title of the science experiment next to *Title of Experiment*, but leave the other categories blank, to be filled in after discussion of the experiment. Also on the chalkboard, or on a separate sheet of posterboard, draw a simple diagram of the parts of the experiment, labeling each ingredient and piece of equipment.

The first day that I don my lab coat and set up preparations for a simple science experiment in front of the class, curiosity runs high.

When all is ready, I invite the young scientists to come into my laboratory. I point out the key words (*Title of Experiment*, etc.) and read them aloud to the class. I also point out the diagram of the experiment on the board or poster and suggest that students refer to it during and after the experiment. And I prepare students further by asking them to think about what might be important in conducting an experiment—for example, measuring ingredients, putting ingredients or equipment together carefully, watching closely to see what happens, etc. When we've discussed the importance of these steps, I conduct the experiment.

After observing the experiment, students volunteer information from their observations to help me fill in the blank categories on the board or poster. I then ask the students, "Was this experiment biological, physical, or chemical?" This question usually sends a few students searching through dictionaries to find out what these words mean. After students answer or make guesses, we talk about the difference between the three terms. Then I direct students to a shelf where I have assembled materials for the activity:

1. Books giving instructions for simple experiments that students can practice at home and then conduct for the class.
2. *Ingredients and equipment* for carrying out these experiments.
3. *Mimeographs* of an 8½" × 11" page divided into these categories: Title of Experiment, Materials, Procedure, Results, Conclusion (a short summary of what you learned). I also provide 8½" × 11" pages titled *Diagram of the Experiment*.

I emphasize that all experiments should be conducted at home under adult supervision before they are conducted in front of the class. When students have chosen their experiments and materials—I keep extra supplies handy in case several students want to perform the same experiment—and partners if desired, we set up a schedule for the demonstrations a week or two later. I ask that students fill in their mimeographed information sheets, draw their labeled diagrams at home, and hand the sheets in to me after their demonstrations. And when, inevitably, one or more experiments fail on the appointed day, I remind everyone that even Einstein made mistakes.

Corky Schwartz, Kipling School, Deerfield, Illinois

Words and Word Problems

I begin this activity by reading a few word problems from a math text and by asking students to notice the format of the word problems—usually one or two statements of information followed by a question. I tell students that they are going to be creating their own word problems using information that we list on the board. Then I copy the four headings listed below onto the chalkboard and ask students to suggest items that might fall under each heading. Examples are included with each heading.

People who might be found in a department store
(salespeople, clerks, shoppers, stock people)

What people do in a department store
(sell, buy, exchange, make refunds, stock the shelves, count the number of items sold)

Items available in a department store and their prices
(ice skates, $50.00; boots, $85.00; skis, $104.00; sunglasses, $7.00; kitchen chairs, $18.00)

Questions that might be asked about sales in the store
(How much money did she give the clerk? How much did she pay in all? How many did she sell? How much change should he get? How much more does he owe? How many items did the stock person put on the shelf? How many were sold by the end of the day?)

Together, the students and I create a few practice problems by combining items from the lists on the board. Here are two examples:

A shopper exchanged $85.00 boots for $104.00 skis. How much more did he have to give the clerk?

> The stock person put 25 pairs of ice skates on the shelf for the clerk to sell. The clerk sold 4 pairs the first day and 11 pairs the second day. How many pairs must the stock person bring out and put on the shelf the third day in order to bring the total number of pairs on the shelf to 30?

Then I ask students to form groups of two or three and to create their own word problems using items from the four lists. When students have written four or five problems, supplying their answers on a separate sheet, they turn their problems and answers in to me for a quick check. After I've checked and returned the problems and answer sheets, each group may exchange problems with another group. In any exchange, the group that authored the problems keeps the answer sheet; together, the members of that group check and return the answers that the other group turns in.

Patricia Condito, Hingham, Massachusetts

Amateur Anthropologists

A social studies project that integrates learning about other cultures with language arts (and that generates enthusiasm besides) is surely one worth passing along. "Amateur Anthropologists" is a project that involves students in:

> listening to speakers and music from another culture
>
> using their own words after consulting encyclopedia accounts
>
> describing pictures and artifacts
>
> discussing their findings with other students
>
> summarizing

To introduce the term *anthropologist* and to heighten students interest, give each student a three-ring binder, a clipboard, or a notebook, which is labeled "Anthropologist." Explain that an anthropologist studies everyday life in our culture as well as the behaviors and lifestyles of other people around the world and in other times. Anthropologists use language to write down exactly what people say and do. Have students suggest ways in which an anthropologist might gather information about another culture. Their list might include:

> reading
>
> studying pictures
>
> interviewing someone from the culture

studying artifacts

living with people in the culture

Familiarize students with the task of studying another culture by reviewing aspects of life in their own culture. Music, food, or photographs of typical activities such as baseball or dancing might provide a starting point. Have students write down their thoughts and record anything that interests them. They will use this information to compare and contrast their culture with another culture.

Have students brainstorm a list of the kinds of information that might interest them about another culture. Possible headings include:

language	music
food	dance
clothing	literature
occupations	art
religions	housing
daily life	transportation

You may want to direct students to select just a few of these categories for their research or to find only a fact or two under each. Also, establish whether students may select any culture for their research, whether they are to pick a culture from a listing you've prepared, or whether all students will be researching the same culture.

Now the students are ready to gather information. Bring research materials into the classroom or spend a few class sessions in the library. Resources to consult include:

photographs

recordings of songs or folktales from the culture

historical fiction

nonfiction accounts

encyclopedias

newspaper or magazine articles

social studies textbooks

Invite speakers who have lived or traveled in other countries to show pictures, to tell stories, to display artifacts, and to be interviewed by the students. If there are children within the school whose native culture would be of interest, invite them to talk to the class. As students listen to speakers and use their resources, they describe and record whatever

impresses them. Once the information collecting is completed, the students organize and write up their findings. For help in summarizing, they may want to talk to other students about what they found out and about the differences between their own culture and the other culture. Plan student-teacher conferences with any students who need help at this stage.

To add a final polish to the writings, students may make them into books. Discuss book format and let students create a table of contents and a glossary, or even a dedication. (Some students may want to prepare maps using the atlas as a reference.)

Finally, laminate or encase the covers in transparent plastic sheets, and watch the students beam with pride as they leaf through their professional-looking anthropology books. Display the books in the classroom so that students are encouraged to read through one another's books and to share interesting discoveries with their classmates.

Anita Zipperer, Green Bay, Wisconsin

Student Newsbreak

Although most students watch television, few watch the news segments. Producing a news program in the classroom requires students to watch television news programs, listen to radio news, or read the newspaper. It also gives students opportunities, in short segments, to speak in front of the class, to gain poise, and to become familiar with the vocabulary and style of newscasting.

The news show takes roughly five to ten minutes at the beginning of each day (or as many days as determined). A simple news station is set up. Equipment consists of a table, three chairs, a logo sign for the station, and a map. Local, regional, or national maps can be enlarged and covered with clear plastic so they can be drawn on with colored markers and wiped clean with a damp cloth.

The panel consists of three reporters: one each for news, sports, and weather. The news reporter is the anchorperson who opens the show with a greeting, reads the news, and wraps up the show with a short feature of human interest. Reports on sports and the weather are given by the other two panelists between news stories. Only the straight news is to be reported; no editorializing is allowed. Urge students to watch the television newscasters: where they look, how they sit and move, how their voices sound, how quickly they speak. Students should get up-to-date information for their news stories from television or radio news reports the night before or the morning of their presentation;

newspapers could also be consulted. Panel members write the highlights of the news stories on note cards for use during the "show." Stories should cover the following topics:

News	
worldwide	Include three to six brief stories. (Avoid gossip—just report the news.)
national	
state	
local	
Weather	
national	Include: natural disasters, temperatures, precipitation, winds, fronts, etc. (Show students where to find this information in the newspaper.)
local	
Sports	
national	Include: all seasonal sports at all levels.
state	
local	
school	

The show may be videotaped if the equipment is available. The reporters will enjoy watching themselves "on the air," and their classmates may wish to offer constructive comments. Rotate reporting assignments. All students should become familiar with television and radio newscasts and with newspapers, and all should have the opportunity to write and read the news. In case of illness, a student must call on a classmate to be a substitute reporter. The news must go on.

Laurie Davis, Jamestown Junior High School, Jamestown, North Dakota

Creating Your Own Utopia

A long-term bookmaking project is a way to put writing at the center of the language arts curriculum and to integrate it with other subject areas. In preparation, students read, discuss, listen, evaluate, and gather ideas. As they work on their books, they share information, ask questions, give and get advice, reread, conference—and write and rewrite. At all stages of the work, students are developing a variety of skills, and the language arts are integrated in a natural, purposeful way.

"Creating Your Own Utopia" is a bookmaking project that involves almost all the areas of the curriculum as students create a world of their own choosing. They can make it any way they like, as realistic or fantastic as they wish. To get started, students should become familiar with or review some other-world stories, such as C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (Macmillan, 1951) about Narnia or Lloyd Alexander's *The Book of Three* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964) about Prydain. An excellent reference for the teacher is Richard Murphy's *Imaginary Worlds: Notes on a New Curriculum* (Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 1974).

Once students have read or listened to several other-world stories, they can begin to create their own utopias—first by describing, then by mapping, and sometimes by drawing or painting. Next, students devise a way to travel to their utopias, whether through a secret door, by space travel, or by some other imaginative means.

The range of the utopia books is almost unlimited, as students decide everything from climate to culture to government of their imagined domains. Questions and suggestions to help students envision their utopias follow:

> What does it look like? Describe it. Draw a map of it.
>
> How did you get there?
>
> Are there schools? What are they like?
>
> What kind of government will you have?
>
> Are there any known problems or enemies? What can you do about them?
>
> What kinds of leisure-time activities are there?
>
> Will there be careers in utopia? What are the opportunities?

Figure 2 shows the many other subject areas that can relate to the utopia project. It provides a network of possibilities, all branching out from a focus on creating imaginary other worlds.

In some areas of the curriculum—such as social studies, science, or health—students will want to draw upon some nonfiction accounts of the phenomena of our own world to get ideas for their creations. In this way, the utopia project can provide a springboard for finding out more about our own real world. If you like the idea described in this section, you'll want to follow the trail to its source, where further background information and more ideas are found in abundance. Check Eileen Tway's *Time for Writing in the Elementary School* (ERIC/RCS and NCTE, 1984), a Theory and Research Into Practice (TRIP) booklet (32 pages). Available from NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801.

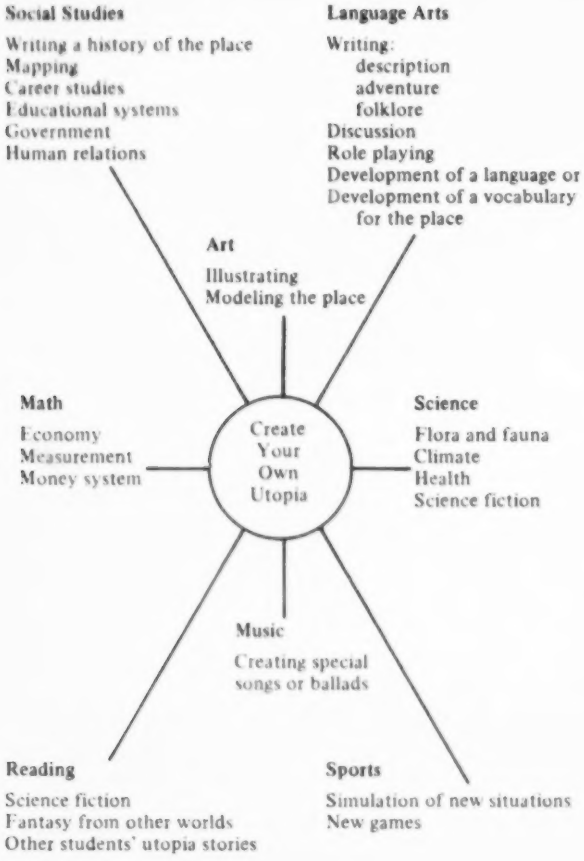


Figure 2. Possible Subject Areas for a Utopia Project.

Senior Models

Here's a strategy that has some of the same benefits of an artist-in-residence program, offering students a secure setting in which to observe and learn from visitors to the class. During this activity, students observe "senior models" carrying out daily tasks that involve language use. The senior models are senior citizen volunteers who visit a class on a regular basis, each time bringing the simple materials needed for that day's task.

Volunteers should be encouraged to choose practical, daily tasks familiar to them. Some possibilities are

reading the instruction manual that accompanies a kitchen appliance

following the directions for assembling or disassembling a small toy or household item

looking for a particular item in the business pages of the phone book (and, optionally, calling several businesses to compare prices)

writing a letter to the editor of the local newspaper

rewriting a favorite recipe to make half the original recipe

selecting an item from a catalog and filling out an order form

making a grocery list

While a volunteer models a task, students observe and ask questions. (The activity could also be set up to allow students to take turns visiting "stations" in the classroom where the volunteers would demonstrate various tasks.) To help students understand the steps involved, volunteers are encouraged to talk about the tasks as they demonstrate. When practical, students are supplied with duplicates of the materials used in the demonstration. Depending on the task, students might be asked to follow along (e.g., reading instructions), to imitate the model (e.g., filling out an order form), or to try the task on their own (e.g., looking for an item in the phone book). Because of the level of involvement generated by this activity, both students and visiting volunteers can benefit.

Tony Kring, Indian Meadows School, Fort Wayne, Indiana

A Town of Our Own

A city map can provide the opportunity for a rich and varied learning experience. Students research issues that affect a town, talk about the challenges involved in owning a home or business, and work with others in making decisions.

Simulation of life in the city begins when I plan and draw a fairly detailed map of our city, drawing in large scale on a sheet of butcher paper that is three by five feet. The city blocks measure ten centimeters square, and I divide each block into four equal pieces that will be the lots used for homes and businesses.

I carefully construct the city map to include distinctly different sections, such as the industrial park area, the modern business section,

the older rundown business area, and several residential areas, including several homesites in "rural" areas on the outskirts of the city. I label key community service institutions, a hospital, churches, police and fire stations, schools, and parks.

Before any discussion, students need to establish their homes and businesses. In order to have representatives from all sections of the city, I identify available homesites and commercial sites throughout the city. For easier identification, I number homesites in red and commerical sites in black. I make sure that there are enough sites for each student to have one home and one business. Then I write the names of twenty-five to thirty (according to the number of students in the class) local businesses on slips of paper and ask students to draw names at random.

I number a second set of slips of paper, again according to how many students are in the class. Students draw numbers, and the student who draws the number one has first choice for a business site, and so on until all sites are chosen. Students might consider traffic patterns, geographical features, or other business locations in making their selections. When all the business sites have been chosen, students choose homesites in reverse order. The student who drew the number one for choosing a business is last for picking a homesite. I suggest that in selecting their homesites, students keep in mind the location of their own and other businesses, schools, parks, or geographical features of the community. Once students are homeowners and business owners, the real action can begin.

Most of the activity takes place around the map. It is a necessary reference and guide for students as they hold city meetings to talk about the changes they would like to see in their town. At the first city meeting, a mayor and three city council members are elected (by vote or by using a random method such as drawing straws) to direct all subsequent meetings. At each meeting, students take turns bringing up problems that require city action. Here are some examples:

> A large sum of money has been donated to the city. How shall we spend that money?
>
> An automobile-wrecking yard owned by a class member offends the neighbors. They object to the noise and clutter. Will the city help?
>
> We suspect that a large chemical plant in our town is polluting the river and killing the fish. What action should we take?
>
> Teenagers in our town don't have enough to do. Teenage crime is rising. What can we do?

All the citizens have the opportunity to voice their opinions on each issue. When all suggestions have been offered and the city leaders decide that no more discussion is necessary, the mayor and the three council members vote on what action to take. They are not bound to follow the consensus of the class, but, as with any politicians, they may suffer the disapproval of the others if they don't. If all four agree to do so, they may pass the issue on to the rest of the students in the class for a vote.

The possibilities for learning in this project are infinite. In the process of identifying timely issues, using you, parents, newspapers, and the media for ideas, students find out about real issues—everything from zoning laws to the rights of public domain. They can also form interest groups and can voice their concerns through letters to the "city officials" in the class, and through editorials or news stories in the classroom "local newspaper." And if students want to exchange or trade businesses, they can negotiate with classmates at a city meeting.

Considering the mapmaking and peacekeeping required of the teacher in charge, this can be a consuming project, but the thrill of seeing students become involved is reward enough for the time invested.

Michael Christensen, Missoula, Montana

Verb Poetry

One way to improve drab writing is to replace over-used verbs with less-used ones. In searching for a way to pass this lesson on to students, I hit upon an activity that reminds students of the verbs they know but rarely use and that shows how many different verbs can describe the same action. In addition, the activity develops sensitivity to rhyme and rhythm.

In a "verb poem," students use verbs to identify an animal or object without naming it. Students say the verbs aloud as they make their selections, in order to consider sound as well as meaning. Completed poems are read to other students who guess what the mystery animal or object is.

1. Students brainstorm a list of three or four dozen verbs by asking such questions as:

   What does a horse do?
   What does a rabbit do?
   What does a bee do?
   What does a train do?

What does the wind do?

Students jot down the verbs in their notebooks, or one student writes verbs in a visible place for the whole class to see.

2. Copy the following shortened sample on the chalkboard and ask students to guess the subject.

I can click
I can whine
I can stop
I can tick
I can chime
I can tock
(answer: a clock)

3. Each student selects a subject for a verb poem. Students then select from the list they've brainstormed those verbs that fit their subject, or they think of other descriptive verbs. Following the form of the sample poem, students write a verb poem that describes what their animal or object can do. Saying the verbs aloud as they write helps them to spot those that sound the best together. The verb poems can be any length, but they should contain at least nine verbs. Students read their completed poems aloud to each other or to the class, and the listeners try to guess the subject. The following are possible subjects for verb poems:

a pair of feet	a soap bubble
a marble	an old car
a siren	a wrecking van
a fire	an ice skater
scissors	a skier
a yo-yo	a rubber ball
a pogo stick	a kitten
a rocket	a mouse
a rusty hinge	a violin

Patricia J. Morton, Park School, Mill Valley, California

Look Again

Common everyday objects are useful tools for teaching students the skill of precise description. Potatoes can be supplied to students at little expense, and students are both entertained and challenged by trying

to distinguish one potato from others that "look just like it." In this activity, students look more carefully at common objects, find exact words to describe minute details, and use analogies, metaphors, and similes to distinguish one potato from another.

You'll need a potato (apple, banana, or other object) for each student. Students will be working in groups, so you may want to bring potatoes for one group, apples for another, bananas for a third, etc. Objects of the same kind need to be roughly the same size and shape.

First, divide the class into groups of four to six students and give each student a sheet of paper and a pencil. Let students pile potatoes in the center of their group, enough for each student to have one. Each student selects a potato and looks it over carefully, recording every detail that might help someone else to identify this particular potato in a group of similar potatoes. Students use similes and metaphors such as: "My potato looks like a face" or "My potato is a baby; it is tiny."

As students inspect their potatoes, ask such questions as: What shape is your potato? Does it have flat spots? How many eyes does it have? Are there any rough spots or other markings? Is the surface the same texture all over?

When students finish writing their observations, each group returns its potatoes to a pile in the center of their group, making certain the potatoes are thoroughly mixed. Next, students exchange descriptions with others in the group and try to find the potato described in their new descriptions. When students have identified the potato, have them trade the pile of potatoes and the descriptions with other groups and try to match each potato with its description. Students discover that enough detail will make even a common object such as a potato unique and identifiable.

Betty Jane Wagner, National College of Education, Evanston, Illinois

Writing to a Pal

Writing letters to pen pals can be fun and purposeful, and in this letter-writing activity, no one is left out. I prepared my seventh graders for this activity by explaining the age range and the experience and interests of the third graders with whom they would be corresponding. The third graders were a valuable audience, readers who my students knew would listen to what they had to say. Through arrangements with the teachers of two third-grade classes, I prepared a list of names of third-

grade students. Each of my students drew a name to obtain a pen pal and initiated the correspondence, paying close attention to letter form.

Since your students have probably all written a letter or two, you can start with a discussion of letter writing in general. Ask a few questions about the type of information that goes into a letter. "Does what you say in your letter depend on the person to whom you are writing?" "What kind of information do you usually include at the beginning of a letter?" Pass a few sample letters and envelopes around the class and ask students to notice the formats used—the location of the date and address, the length of paragraphs, and the way the letters "close." (Some of my students realized for the first time during this activity just whose address goes in the upper right-hand corner of the letter.)

To prevent students' letters from drifting off into recitations of data about themselves, ask them to include as part of every letter an anecdote such as they might write to a friend, along the lines of "Let me tell you something that happened to me." Some of my students went on to invite their readers to do likewise, "Now you tell me about something that happened to you." And the third graders did, responding with letters that included stickers and drawings, and in one case the beginning of a riddle exchange. Just to ensure against inappropriate language, I read outgoing and incoming "mail" before sending or distributing it, as did the third-grade teachers.

My students wrote to third graders in another school district, but you may find it more convenient to choose a third-grade class in the same district. In either case, you will probably want to hand-deliver the letters in one packet since it costs nothing and allows you to control the date of delivery. We delayed delivery in the case of school absences to make sure that each student received a letter each time. And when my class completed this project in the spring, many of the third graders wrote rather wistfully to the older students that they hoped their pen pals would continue to write over the summer.

Doris Blough, Harold C. Johnson Middle School, Rock Hill, South Carolina

Wonder Time

A "wonder time" is a type of brainstorming during which I ask students to think of and list anything and everything they wonder about. Students come up with all sorts of questions, from "I wonder why the pool

doesn't stay open after 7?" to "I wonder if caterpillars know they are going to be butterflies?"

Students jot down their questions along with ideas on how the answers might be found. Their lists can then be used as references in discussion and, where appropriate, in group research. For example, one student wrote, "I wonder what goes into growing an acre of grain?" Students gathered the following facts: four million pounds of water, one hundred and sixty-two pounds of nitrogen, fifty pounds of magnesium, and two pounds of iron. The final answer was that 4,012,504 pounds of minerals, water, and chemicals would be needed to grow an acre of grain! A question such as this can also lead to other questions, such as "I wonder what goes into my bowl of breakfast cereal?"

Wonder times can accompany any subject, general or specific, to increase independent questioning and to take thinking beyond the ordinary.

Jane B. Matanzo, Frederick, Maryland

Storyteller's Stump

A prop that helped me interest my fifth graders in storytelling was a chair that I disguised as a stump and placed in the center of the classroom for storytelling. The novelty of this approach worked well to motivate my students.

I first presented a brief history of storytelling. I explained how some storytellers traveled from one part of the country to another telling stories to anyone who would listen, and how a storyteller would often sit on an old stump as the audience gathered. Then I explained that we had a "storyteller's stump" of our own for students to sit on while telling stories to the class. I brought out the chair that I had disguised as a stump with brown paper and felt-tip pens.

Students chose stories from easy-to-read picture books in the library and rehearsed at home and in class until they felt ready to sit on the storyteller's stump and tell their stories to a group of classmates. Students found other uses for the stump as well: for reading their own poems and stories, for telling riddles and jokes, and for practicing presentations and parts in plays. The storyteller's stump was also a big hit when my students told their stories to the primary students in our school.

Carolyn D. Laird, Spring, Texas

Mrs. Hurwitz Screeched at the Class

An exercise using one changing sentence can sensitize upper elementary students to the power of descriptive verbs. I begin by writing a sentence across the board and reading it aloud. I use my own name: "Mrs. Hurwitz spoke to the class." I ask students what picture it brings to mind. Then I change the sentence to read, "Mrs. Hurwitz screeched at the class." I ask students what they picture when they hear this sentence. Finally, students brainstorm in groups for other words that they could substitute for *talk* in the sentence on the board. After five or ten minutes, students from each group read aloud their new sentences. To emphasize the number of possibilities and introduce students to new words, ask a volunteer to look up the word *talk* in the thesaurus and to read aloud any synonyms for *talk* that weren't suggested by students.

Sharon Hurwitz, Hampton, Virginia

Don't Stab the Steak

"Company Manners," a poem by Eve Merriam from *Out Loud* (Atheneum, 1973) can heighten students' awareness of simple but vivid words—especially verbs. Alliteration makes the words in this poem move, as Merriam creates a humorous list of do's and don'ts for eating when guests are at the table. Take off on Merriam's poem by reading it aloud to the class and then asking students to play with a variety of alliterative verb and noun combinations, such as don't torture the tuna; don't punish the prunes; don't badger the baked beans; don't contemplate the cabbage; don't tease the turkey; don't aggravate the okra, etc.

Mary M. Krogness, Ludlow School, Shaker Heights, Ohio

Food Diaries

Ask your students to keep diaries of everything they eat and drink during a twenty-four-hour period. The following day, introduce a USDA food table and Recommended Dietary Allowance chart and help students determine whether the foods eaten the previous day fulfill the RDA requirements. Students can use the chart to find out what is contained in their favorite foods, to take notes on foods high in the various requirements (proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, etc.), and to prepare well-balanced menus for a day or week.

Angela Lazos, Whitestone, New York

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